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25
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30
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35
40
35
ILLYRICUM
Lychnitis L.
Pelagonia
Philippi
Amphipolis
Neapolis
Thessalonica
Berea
Apollonia
THASOS
SAMOTHRACIA
Dium
IMBROS
LEMNOS
CORCYRA
Troas
TENEDOS
Assos
Adramyttium
Mytilene
LESBOS
Pergamos
Thyatira
SCYROS
CEPHALLENIA
ZACYNTHUS
Corinth
Cenchrea
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Athens
ANDROS
TENOS
Smyrna
CHIOS
Sardis
Philadelphia
Ephesus
SAMOS
Hermus R.
Meander R.
Laodicea
Hierapolis
Colossæ
Miletus
Trogilium Pr.
PATMOS
NAXOS
COS
Cnidus
CYTHERA
Rhodes
RHODES
CARPATHUS
CASOS
C. Salmone
Phenice
CLAUDA
Fair Havens
Byzantium
Propontis
Nicomedia
Nicæa
R. Hebrus
Sangarius R.
R. Halys
Gangra
Tavium
Pessinus
Mazaca Cæsarea
Argæus M.
Tatta L.
Antioch of Pisidia
LYCAONIA
Iconium
Lystra
Derbe
Tarsus
Perga
Attalia
Patara
Myra
Selencia
Antioch
Orontes R.
Euphrates R.
MESOPOTAMIA
COMMAGENE
CYPRUS
Salamis
Paphos
Damascus
PHOENICIA
MAP SHOWING LOCATION OF
THE SEVEN CHURCHES
IN ASIA
SCALE OF MILES
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# THE MESSAGES

TO THE

# SEVEN CHURCHES OF ASIA

BEING

THE INAUGURAL OF THE ENTHRONED KING
A BEACON ON ORIENTAL SHORES

BY
REV. THOMAS MURPHY, D.D., LL.D.

PHILADELPHIA
PRESBYTERIAN BOARD OF PUBLICATION
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1895

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# PREFATORY NOTE.

It is with pleasure that I comply with the request of my life-long friend, the Rev. Thomas Murphy, D. D., LL.D., to prepare a brief Prefatory Note to his treatise on The Messages to the Seven Churches of Asia. To the preparation of that work, which I have read with great interest and profit, my friend has devoted many years of devout and studious labor. I heartily commend it to the careful study of the ministers and members of the Church of Christ.

While I do not agree with all the positions and conclusions of the author, I cannot but recognize that he has a right to be heard by the Church on a subject for the study of which he has been singularly equipped by education and grace, and to which he has given many years of prayerful and laborious attention. I am glad to say that the differences of opinion between us do not relate to matters that can be regarded as essential.

The Epistles to the Seven Churches are not receiving that attention from students of the Sacred Scriptures to which they are entitled—in view of the transcendent dignity of their Author, the circumstances under which they were given, and the objects manifestly contemplated in their revelation. They come to us directly from the heart and mind of Jesus; they are the only direct utterances of our ascended and enthroned Lord to His servants bereaved of His visible presence; they were given at one of the most critical periods in the history of the Church—the first contact of the gospel with the Gentile world; they were designed not merely for the instruction of the Seven Churches to which they were immediately addressed, but for the warning and comfort of the entire Church militant

in all lands and throughout all ages until Christ shall come again to earth in glory. All these points Dr. Murphy has seized upon and elaborated with singular power. He has well styled these Messages "The Inaugural of the Enthroned King —A Beacon on the Oriental Shores."

The plan of the treatise is peculiar. It cannot be set forth in a brief prefatory note; nor is it necessary that it should be, since that work has been well performed in the Introductory chapter. A careful study of that chapter is essential to a due appreciation of the book.

With the earnest prayer that this crowning work of my beloved friend may redound to the glory of Christ in the increased knowledge and spirituality of the Church to which His messages were sent, I again commend that work to the prayerful and studious attention of my brethren.

E. R. CRAVEN.

# CONTENTS.


## INTRODUCTION.

PAGES

Beacon of the Ages—First Contact of Christianity with Paganism—Striking Peculiarities of the Passage—General Plan of the Messages—Principles of Interpretation—Plan of the Book . . . . . 1-8

## CHAPTER I.

HISTORIC LAND.

General View—Influence on World's History—Location and Extent of Country—Country Described—Surface and Contour—Mountains—Valleys, Plains and Table-lands, Rivers—Climate—Productions, Forests, and Mines—Cities—Roads—People—Peculiarities of the Country—History—Great Events—Great Men—Celebrated Objects—Gracious Providences Involved . . . . . 9-38

## CHAPTER II.

CHRISTIANITY'S FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH PAGANISM.

Great Religious Movement in Asia Minor—Enterprise Peculiar and for Peculiar End—Original Religions of the Land—Ante-Pauline Movements—Special Work in the Several Cities—Paul's Greatest Work—John's Connection with the Work—Glimpses of Timothy's Work—Rapidity of Church's Growth—Strength of the Church in Numbers—Strength of the Church in Religion . . . . . 39-61

## CHAPTER III.

MESSAGES FROM HEAVEN.

Careful Study Needed—Unique Portion of Scripture—Many Books on—Its Importance in God's Esteem—Location of Messages in Apocalypse—When Written—Places and Destination of Writing—"Holy Theologian"—Poem on Death of John . . . . . 62-81

## CHAPTER IV.

MESSAGES, SYMBOLS, SYSTEM, SEVEN.

PAGES

Messages from Heaven—Intended for All Times and Places—Great Number of Symbols—Design of Symbols—Novelty of Symbols—Symbols taken from Local Objects—Old Testament Allusions—Symmetry of the Messages—Seven Elements in Each Message—Gradation in the Promises—Design of the Symmetry—Seven—Meaning of the Number Seven . . . . 82–103

## CHAPTER V.

STAR-ANGELS

Subject of the Chapter—Principles Guiding Our Investigations—Views of Others to be Studied—Various Theories—True Theory—First Process of Reasoning: Stars as Lights, Angels as Spiritual Authority—Second Process of Reasoning—Third Process of Reasoning—Sum of Whole Argument—Dignity of Ministerial Office—Church, Special Care as to its Ministry . . . . . 104–122

## CHAPTER VI.

BEACON ON THE SHORES.

Every Part of Scripture a Special Purpose—This Purpose should be Discovered—How to be Discovered—Purpose of the Messages—Historical Design—Prophetical Design—Chiefly a Beacon—First Experiment of Christianity with the Pagan World Constituted the Beacon—Proconsular Asia a Suitable Country for the Experiment—All Forms of Church Life Exemplified—Various Classes Encountered—Life Pictures—Minute Phases of Church Experience—Spirit Recorded the Experiment in a Special Manner—Beacon to be Made Conspicuous—Lessons of the Beacon . . . . . 123–144

## CHAPTER VII.

LIGHT OF ASIA.

Ephesus the Greatest Emporium of Proper Asia—Where and What—Amount of its Population—Its Commerce—Influence on Other Lands—Famed for Worship of Diana—Her Great Temple—Great Treasury—Shrine-manufacture—Large Revenue—Crowds Attracted—Right of Asylum—World's Fair—Memorable Things Concerning Ephesus—Seven Sleepers of Ephesus—Epistle to Ephesians—Councils of Ephesus—Why Dwell so Long on this City . . . . . 147–170

## CHAPTER VIII.

HOME OF THE HOLY THEOLOGIAN.

PAGES

Planting the Church—Its Mission—Central Point—Evil Results of Leaving First Love—Attribute Here Used—Commendations—Counsel from God—Menace—Present Desolations—The Conquerors—Tree of Life . . 171–198

## CHAPTER IX.

QUEEN OF THE LEVANT.

"The Devil shall Cast Some of You into Prison"—Notable City—City and Church—Location—City in Ancient Times—History—Planting of its Church—Central Point—Title of Son of Man—Poverty, Works, and Sufferings—Riches—Blasphemy of the Jews—Polycarp—"Ten Days' Tribulation"—Encouragements—Fidelity and Reward—Conquest and Safety—Smyrna as it is Now—Inhabitants—Warning of the Beacon 201–238

## CHAPTER X.

OXFORD OF THE ORIENT.

Celebrated City—City as a Royal Residence—Æsculapius—Satan's Seat—Great Library; Parchment—Planting of its Church—Titles of Son of Man—Trials and Steadfastness—Antipas—Balaam—Nicolaitans—Idol-meats and Fornication—Admonished to Repent—Fighting with Sword of His Mouth—Overcome What?—Hidden Manna, White Stone, and New Name . . . . . 241–284

## CHAPTER XI.

THE WHITE CASTLE.

Thyatira—History of City and Church—Apollo its Deity—Titles of Christ—Commendations—Central Point—Jezebel—Punishment Threatened—Seductions—Rewarded according to Works—Promise to Particular Church—Admonition—"Depths of Satan"—Overcoming—Power over the Nations—Morning Star . . . . . 287–326

## CHAPTER XII.

GOLDEN SANDS.

Peculiarities of the Church—Location—City as it Was—Its History—Golden Sands—Crœsus—Objects of Peculiar Interest—Deity of the City—City as it Is—Planting and History of its Church—Name of Son of God—Central Point—Censure—"Few Names even in Sardis"—Approbation—Threatening—Overcome What?—Promises—"Not blot out Name out of Book of Life"—"Confess their Names"—"Walk with Me in White" 329–368

## CHAPTER XIII.

CITY OF GOD.

PAGES

Character of the Message—Location of the City—Land of Earthquakes—City Then—History—Jewish Colony—Deity of the City—Origin and State of the Church—Name of Son of Man—Central Point—Approbation—Promises to the Church—Counsel—General Promises—City Now—Place in the Beacon . . . . . 371–416

## CHAPTER XIV.

THE WRETCHED ONE.

Message—Location—Laodicea Then—History—Deity of the City—Planting of the Church—Title of Son of Man—Rebuke—Central Point—Counsels—Warning—The Overcoming—Local Promise—General Promise—City Now—Place in the Beacon . . . . . 419–471

## CHAPTER XV.

KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

Titles of Christ Classified—Right to Mediatorial Throne—First and Last—Son of God—Key of David—Holdeth Stars in Right Hand—Sword with Two Edges—Eyes like Flame of Fire—Hath Seven Spirits of God—Holy and True—Amen—Faithful and True . . . . . 472–485

## CHAPTER XVI.

CELESTIAL WATCHER.

Watcher—Providence Influences All Events—Knowledge of All Things—Place in the Beacon—Be Cheered! . . . . . 486–498

## CHAPTER XVII.

DARK SPOTS.

All but Two Rebuked—Devil, Ape of God—Errors Generally Perverted Truths—Errors in Doctrine and Practice Go Together—Danger of Affiliating with Sin—Opposition Good for a Church—Aims after Perfection—Loss of First Love—Progress Downward of Sin—Worldliness—Undue Love of Riches—Pride—Sensuality—Warnings Needed at Present Time—Depraving Influence of the Flesh—Lascivious Influence of Paganism—Balaam Infamous—Nicolaitans Worst of All—Antinomianism Always Appearing—Hypocrisy, Great Evil of—Lukewarm Indifference Now Reigning—Evils of Present Day . . . . . 499–520

## CHAPTER XVIII.

FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT.

PAGES

God Praises Before He Blames—All Analyzed—Care of First Love—Appreciating Advantages—Improving Advantages—Working for Christ—Enthusiasm—Continuance in Well-doing—Humility—Patience—Intolerance of Evil—Suffering for Christ's Sake—Brotherly Love—Steadfastness in the Faith—Guarding Against False Teachers—Growth in Grace—Loyalty to Christ . . . . . 521–542

## CHAPTER XIX.

COUNSELLOR.

Counsels Classified—Counsels of a Friend—Adapted to the Conflicts—Repent—Be Watchful—Shun Temptation—Guard the Truth—Improve Advantages—Strive to be Perfect—Have No Fear for Future of the Church—Go Directly to Christ in All Trials—Persevere to the End—Be Earnest . . . . . 543 560

## CHAPTER XX.

WORDS OF DOOM.

Punishing, God's Strange Work—Punishment According to Guilt—Punishment Corresponds with Nature of the Guilt—Privileges Neglected are Taken Away—The Persistently Impenitent Abandoned—Punishment is Inflicted by God's Mouth—As a Thief in the Night—Proud Sinners Humbled—Certain Sins Punished in this World—Sin Against the Holy Ghost . . . . . 561–580

## CHAPTER XXI.

CORDS OF LOVE, OR PROMISES.

Two Promises to Each Message—Promises All Divine—Promises of the Messages Expanded in the Body of the Apocalypse—Promises given in Symbolic Language—Promises given in Form of Rewards—Promises Correspond with Character of Church—Promises are in Progressive Degrees—First Degree (Ephesus), Immortality—Second Degree (Smyrna), Not Hurt of Second Death—Third Degree (Pergamos), Everlasting Friendship of Christ—Fourth Degree (Thyatira), Power over the Nations—Fifth Degree (Sardis), Trophies of his Mediatorial Achievement—Sixth Degree (Philadelphia), Pillars in God's Temple—Seventh Degree (Laodicea), Seat in God's Throne—The Morning Star . . . . . 581–609

## CHAPTER XXII.

MORTAL ATTENTION SUMMONED, OR CHARGE TO GIVE EARNEST HEED.

PAGES

"He that hath an Ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the Churches"—God's Estimate of the Message—Always highly Esteemed by Eminent Believers—Esteemed from Peculiar Form and Language—God's Call to Heed It—Structure Shows its Importance—The Appeal is from the Holy Ghost—Charge Sent Down from God's Throne—Because of Existing Spiritual Evils—What is to be Done?—God's Ordained Remedy—Sadly Ignored—Effect, if the Church Heeded—Present an Era for Testing It—Heed This, and Not Human Contrivances—Transcendent Importance of the Messages . . . . . 610–628

## CHAPTER XXIII.

KEY-NOTE OF THE APOCALYPSE.

"Behold He Cometh!"—Fundamental Thought of the Apocalypse—Great Stress on, in Bible—What Event Specially Intimated—First, Pentecost—Second, Providential Visitation—Third, Death—Fourth, Destruction of Jerusalem—Fifth, Conversion of World—Sixth, The Judgment—In Full, *Totality of Events in the Kingdom from Pentecost to the Judgment*—Special Connection with the Messages—Events of the Ages, Footsteps of God's Coming—Crisis of His Coming—When Will It Be?—"Come Quickly"—Precursory Movements—Design of His Coming Again—Scenes of the Great Day—Results of That Day—Ascend the Watch-tower—Be Ready . . . . . 629–660

THE

# INAUGURAL OF THE ENTHRONED KING.

## INTRODUCTION.

IN the divine plan of revelation, whether considered as the whole volume of Scripture or the Apocalypse alone, what is the special purpose of the messages to the seven churches? What want do they supply? What niche do they fill? Should they be left out of the volume, what loss would there be? Such was the thought that gave rise to the present volume. Apparently, the epistles are no integral part of the book of Revelation, and yet they stand in its forefront, as if they were needed for the very commencement of the book. Assured as we are that the method adopted by the Holy Ghost is, and must be, not only the best, but absolutely perfect, we can have no question but that this portion of his word must have an important design. What is it?

Protracted investigation of this question has led to the conviction that here we have made known to us the germs of all church life, good and bad, put forth under apostolic superintendence, which germs, fully developed, form the whole body of the Apocalypse. And then, regarding that church life in its influence upon either individuals or communities, as well as tested by that first period of the Church's history, the result is set up as a warning and guiding beacon for the people of God in all the subsequent ages.

These seven epistles, the first messages from Jesus after his ascension, may be appropriately regarded as the INAUGURAL OF THE ENTHRONED KING OF THE CHURCH.

A vital point, if not *the* vital point, in all our studies of this subject is the fact that here we have to do with the *first contact of Christianity with what was virtually unmixed Paganism*. Previous to this, the gospel had been preached chiefly to Jewish communities which had religious ideas and nomenclature and conceptions. But here all these were wanting, and simple Christianity was for the first time brought face to face with simple paganism. It was a test

of the normal influence of Christianity upon the pagan mind before prejudices had been awakened or enmities aroused or worldly interests involved, and the results are here communicated with absolute truthfulness. It was an experiment for the whole world and for all time, so that its importance cannot be over-estimated.

For this and other reasons, this whole passage contained in the first three chapters of the Apocalypse is one of marvelous significance and importance. "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein." In truth, it is a history of the formative events, the principles, and the influences of that opening period when the gospel was taking root among mankind. It is a picture of the religious events of the time and of the great principles of the kingdom as they lay in the sight of Jehovah. To make it the more impressive, it is given in the form of a special communication from the throne of God. Moreover, it is enforced by words of the deepest emphasis and solemnity—"Blessed is he that readeth;" "Behold I come quickly;" "He that hath ears to hear," and others which are calculated to stir up the most sluggish soul. It is not merely a history: it is also a prophecy, a warning, a directory of life and godliness, and a most solemn caution from our adorable God. Unique in its character, in its position, in its form, it is also a discriminating rule of life for every soul that would walk with God and that would be acknowledged before the assembled universe at the last day as a trophy of our Lord's achievement in saving the lost world.

In attempting to set forth the meaning and spirit of such a passage of the Divine Word, I cannot but recognize the great difficulty of the undertaking. It would be affectation to profess that I do not hope to present some of its points in a light not hitherto discovered, and which will impart to them a fresh interest. It seems necessary for me, therefore, to indulge in a preface more full than is customary—to make it, in fact, a sort of introduction, explanatory of my plan of treating the subject, with the relations of its parts to each other.

The passage abounds in striking peculiarities. On its very surface we discern by a simple glance eight or ten series according to which its various elements are arranged in beautiful and significant order. There are seven cities, with each its church; these cities are introduced according to the order of a rude geographic circle; in the message to each city there are seven elements or points; these points are all introduced in a similar order; in the series of promises there is a progress from the lowest up to the highest; every message closes with the same words; in each church there is to be

a struggle with evil and a triumph to the people of God. Such orderliness is not mere chance. It does not simply happen to be so. There is a purpose in it. It is significant. A wisdom that never errs and a goodness that has no limit so ordered it for the glory of our Lord, the prosperity of his Church, and the welfare of his blood-bought followers.

Although, in the course of my work, probably every verse and phrase is more or less fully explained, yet it is not intended as a commentary, but as an analysis of the whole passage, with investigations of the purpose of the Holy Ghost in the momentous truths which are presented in such remarkable form as the sacred volume draws to a close—such analysis as may bring out distinctly God's providential purposes concerning his newly-founded kingdom. This divine plan will lead us into three distinct lines of investigation, or separate the general subject into three divisions: *First*, the purpose of God in sending down such a communication to his people—the *rationale* of the messages and the condition of the people to whom they were sent. This will involve the questions, What was the country? How and when were the respective churches planted? What is the nature of the messages? Why are such and so many symbols used? What is meant by the angels of the churches? What is the precise purpose of the whole? *Second*, a detailed description of the cities of the seven churches, of the influences arising therefrom, of the messages sent to each, of the peculiarities of the church life involved, and of the special objects contemplated by each of the seven messages. *Third*, it being found that in each of the messages there are seven points or elements which are precisely similar in all, these seven points are collected into one body, analyzed, and classified, each element or seven elements into a chapter by itself, and as such studied out in all its principles, duties, and privileges, so as to form a body of important instruction on that particular subject.

It is manifest that a passage of Scripture so peculiar, so systematic, so significant, and so evidently intended for a purpose of extraordinary importance must involve principles of interpretation which are themselves extraordinary. Principles or rules must guide us in our search for the meaning of a passage on which the Holy Spirit evidently laid so much stress. The subject is too important for us to rest upon mere conjectures. We must follow principles of investigation, and these must be wrought out of the substance of the passage itself. They must bear their evidence of genuineness with them. After long and patient investigation of the passage in its relations

and connections, the following list of principles has revealed itself so clearly that I cannot but accept its guidance. These principles constitute the key by which at every point I have striven to unlock the meaning of this significant portion of Scripture. Of these twenty-one principles, six—viz. 2, 5, 8, 12, 15, and 16—are so obvious that they have been recognized and used by all interpreters. The remaining fifteen are the result of the long-protracted study which I have given to the subject.

1. This passage is so unique that in its interpretation we can obtain but little aid from other portions of Scripture, and must therefore rely for guidance chiefly upon its own words.

2. "Every word, if rightly viewed, effects a special purpose."

3. These messages cover the history of the first contact of unmixed paganism with Christianity under apostolic supervision—a period of sixty-three years—and the result is here set up as a beacon for the guidance of all subsequent ages.

4. We have here all the germs of church life, good and bad, and the full development of these constitutes the rest of the Apocalypse; hence these messages are placed in the fore-front of the book of Revelation.

5. These seven churches were types of the characteristics of all church life, good and bad.

6. As the Ten Commandments contain the substance of the whole moral law, and as the Sermon on the Mount contains the substance of the gospel's practical effects, so these seven messages contain the substance of the Church's future destiny.

7. Seven of the leading deities of Paganism had each the metropolis of its worship in one of these seven cities; *i. e.* Diana in Ephesus, Homer (deified) in Smyrna, Æsculapius in Pergamos, Apollo in Thyatira, Cybele in Sardis, Bacchus in Philadelphia, and Jupiter in Laodicea. The messages are therefore an attack upon Satan in his strongholds.

8. "Behold he cometh" is the key which, in an important sense, unlocks the meaning of the whole passage.

9. "*The coming of Christ*" expresses the totality of the events connected with the kingdom from Pentecost to the Judgment.

10. In each message there is one central point which contains the substance of that message and around which everything else is grouped.

11. In each message a different title is given to the *Son of man as the administrator of the divine kingdom*, which title is adapted

to the condition of that particular church, and which titles, taken together, express his full qualifications for that sublime office.

12. The messages are constructed upon precisely the same plan, a part of which plan is that in each of them there are seven elements; *i. e.* 1st. Some title of the Son of God; 2d. Something in the church rebuked; 3d. Something commended; 4th. Some counsel given; 5th. A threatening; 6th. A promise; 7th. The call, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

13. Such exact system is, among other things, a prophetic intimation of the definite plan according to which God will conduct the affairs of his kingdom throughout the coming ages.

14. So many and such strange symbols are used because undoubtedly that pagan people, receiving the gospel then for the first time, had no nomenclature for the expression of Christian ideas, and so these figures had to be made use of for that purpose.

15. In each message we find the word "overcometh" with its accompanying ideas.

16. At or near the close of each message we find the charge, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches."

17. In the first three messages, the chief agent in which is the Church, the "overcometh," which is the *Church's part*, comes last; in the other four, the chief agent in which is the Spirit, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches," which is the *Spirit's part*, comes last.

18. In each message there are two promises with associated charges—one local, to that particular people; the other general, for all people.

19. In the list of promises, taken as a whole, there is a gradual progress in the degree of pledged blessedness, beginning with the lowest, that to Ephesus: "I will give to eat of the tree of life," which is simply immortality, up to the highest, that to Laodicea: "I will grant to sit with me in my throne"—the richest promise to the most tempted people.

20. The strangely significant promise, "I will give him the morning star," first pledged in the messages and afterward repeated at the close of the Apocalypse, is the divine engagement to the faithful that Christ would evermore impart freshness, novelty, and brighter and brighter hope to all the glories awaiting them.

21. This whole passage is the sublime inaugural of our glorified Lord. Having purchased his Church by his death on the cross,

and then ascended up to the right hand of the Father and thence sent down the Holy Ghost, who laid the foundations of his Church, composed of the souls gathered in during the first sixty-three years, he now delivers to them his first official communication from on high, proclaiming, "Behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death."

Such are the important principles underlying these messages. When applied in any connection or at any point of the messages, they expand, explain, and introduce us to a new world of exalting truth—a world in which the footsteps of our God may be seen and the glorious destiny of the kingdom anticipated.

A brief explanation of the way in which I have treated the subject will be of use in leading to a better understanding of the various points introduced, and of their connection with each other and with the general subject of our work.

As already stated, the second division of the general subject involves a detailed account of the seven cities in which the churches were located, and of the peculiarities of the church life which in each case arose therefrom. I have therefore striven to present a full description of the times and places and people to whom the messages were sent. I have studied the history, the location, and the physical features of the cities. I have endeavored to describe the times and the people among whom the respective churches were planted, their character, their institutions, their customs, their modes of life, their industries, their peculiarities of worship, their culture, the special events which had marked their annals, their place in the progress of humanity, and all the corresponding influences which tended to give character to their church life. This I have done because it was the plan of the Holy Ghost in the Scriptures, and because these things explain the character of the church, help to awaken and fix attention, increase interest in the subject, often impart important light, give a better understanding of the Spirit's intent in the things he communicates, and certainly establish the whole more clearly and permanently in the memory.

Only the most careful investigation enables us to see how vast is the number of points of doctrine and duty which are contained in the passage—how full is the instruction it contains concerning motives and hopes and principles and all else which are calculated to make the man of God perfect in every good work. All

these I have endeavored to ascertain and to explain, not only in themselves, but also in their various relations and positions in this profound and suggestive communication from the throne of God. I have not intentionally omitted one such point, however difficult or unimportant it may have appeared. In this way I have striven to make this work a *thesaurus* of the wealth of divine instruction sent us here by the Lord Jesus.

This purpose of the work has led me to enter carefully into the minutiæ of every point, in which I was only following the example of our Lord in the passage. I have never been satisfied with mere general statements or speculations. On the contrary, finding the material abundant in the sacred record, in every instance where possible, as succinctly as in my power, I have given particulars, numbers, dates, localities, and all else calculated to throw light on the subject and to clothe it with life and reality.

A rule from which I have never departed is to treat every word, wherever found, as having been placed there for a special purpose and as having a special significance in the mind of that infinite wisdom from which it came. I have striven against the two opposite extremes—one, of making the work a dry skeleton or chronological list of dates, names, and places; the other, of indulging in mere fancy and sentiment. Against the former I have guarded by clothing every point with as much life as in my power; against the other, by avoiding simple conjectures and imaginings, and by diligently searching for and embodying all facts and traditions (given as such) of those early days where they served to throw light and life into the narrative.

As it has been a leading purpose with me from the first to adapt this work to popular use, I have seldom cited the original Greek. Excepting in a very few instances, when indispensable for explanation, I have not done so. To be understood without mistake and without effort has always been in my judgment a prime rule of all composition. It is certainly better to use a circumlocution than a combination of letters from the alphabet that has no meaning and that can but obstruct and perplex the reader.

Whenever it has become necessary to consider the reasons or arguments for or against any point, I have given the *results*, and not the *process*. To have done otherwise would have lengthened out my work beyond all reasonable bounds.

For similar reasons, it would not comport with my purposes to give the opinions of others with their arguments and investigations, and so I have generally given their views alone. Some-

times I have had to wade through volumes in order to grasp some subject, but have given only my own conclusions at last. This may often have the disadvantage of appearing to be dogmatic and self-opinioned, but it could not be avoided, and when understood is no real blemish.

Out of gratitude for the aid they have given me, I name a few of the many authors whom I have consulted: Arundell, Tristram, Kitto, Barnes, Horne, Newton, Bengel, Cooke, Lowman, Neander, Schaff, Butler, Trench, Plumptre, Blunt, Fausset, Milligan, and Craven, whose notes in Lange's *Commentary* are the most valuable of all I have seen.

From the nature of this work, very full indices are indispensable. It is, in fact, by aid of its indices that it must be studied. Three indices have therefore been prepared with the greatest care, namely: 1. A full table of contents, reaching to every leading point; 2. An alphabetical index of all the various points which are treated in its pages; 3. A scriptural index, which is in fact a kind of commentary, pointing out every verse and clause of the messages, as well as all other scriptural passages which are treated.

Paramount among these prefatory explanations I would place the object indicated by the second title of the volume: "Beacon on the Oriental Shores." This object I have never lost sight of in all the years I have devoted to the work. Previous to the reception of these messages from the throne of God even true believers had no adequate knowledge of the doctrines and duties, the principles and obligations, the hopes and prospects involved in the progress of the gospel which they had just received. But all these were brought to light and clearly defined through the first contact of Christianity with paganism. They were thus germinated and evolved, and that while the inspired apostle John was still with the churches to direct their work and preserve them from mistakes. Meanwhile, the providence of God directed to their being placed in an abiding record, being raised up on high as a beacon that could be seen by every eye and read in every age. It was a beacon which all could behold and understand, and from it learn the lessons of everlasting truth and righteousness. It is a beacon that beams out still—beams on us of the present age, and demands of us that we give it the most earnest heed. Oh, that He who first set it up and who still keeps it shining brightly may also impart to us that wisdom from on high which will evermore preserve us from neglecting its blessed guidance!

# CHAPTER I.

## THE HISTORIC LAND.

### 1. THE GENERAL VIEW.

We are assured that in the counsels of God pertaining to his kingdom in any country there is nothing that is without a plan and purpose. Hence, in studying the interests of that kingdom in any particular country, our first investigations must be concerning the place, the people, and the time. The whole volume of history manifests clearly that there is an infinitely wise and powerful providence presiding over all human affairs, and adapting countries to the people, the events, and the purposes which are to be accomplished. The localities of earth and man and the destinies of man are so linked together and dependent on each other as to prove beyond a doubt that they are all shaped by the same infallible skill and power. There is a divine philosophy in this whose wonders are unsearchable.

The land of the seven churches, now called Anatolia, was an illustration of this. It was in accordance with the divine plan that in that land the glorious gospel of the Son of God should start on its career of exterminating paganism and redeeming the lost race of men, and out of that race forming the grand and earth-wide kingdom of God. That land, we may confidently assert, was the most suitable of all lands for that purpose. This we claim because of the perfect skill and power of Him who is the contriver of all; besides, a careful examination in detail corroborates and makes the fact still more apparent. When we look into the physical characteristics of the country and explore its annals, we find that, by the unerring wisdom of Him who doeth according to the counsel of his own will, all things were planned so as to contribute to the building up of the kingdom of Christ upon the ruins of the empire of Satan—an enterprise the first great movements of which were witnessed in this Asiatic land. There, prepared by the foresight of Omniscience, were a civilization that was capable of comprehending and improving the truths which were imparted—a people representing the various tribes of mankind, and trained to the appreciation of the loftier thoughts of

sacred things—a location that could send currents of sacred truth throughout the nations—a territory around which rolled the seas that swept afar over earth's brightest shores—a climate and richness of resources for human well-being that attracted the most enterprising sons of earth—and a land of mountains and streams capable of sustaining a population that could endure the hardship requisite to maintain the truth against an adverse world.

We find, as we enter into a minute investigation, that the country, the people, and the times were all ripe for the momentous events that were now to be unfolded. The physical characteristics of the land were such as would most effectively contribute their aid in working out the great purposes of God toward his Church. The country stood so related to the other civilized lands that any important movement in it would inevitably spread throughout them all. The people had been prepared by steps, both intellectual and moral, such that they were ready to welcome and improve the new influences which would change their whole prospects. All the drifts of human history had unmistakably tended toward this point in which they culminated just as certainly as if God's hand had been visible in directing thereto.

We are to study these seven messages as amongst the most remarkable of all the communications which have ever come down from God to man, and we want to know the place and the people who received them, as well as the character of the country which that people inhabited. But, in order to that, we should get near to them in both time and place—we should be at home in that historic land—we should breathe the atmosphere of its valleys—we should climb over its mountains—we should wander along its rivers—and we should be braced by the gales that blow over its shores. We should gaze upon its world-renowned wonders, which have arrested the attention of all generations. We should journey over its great Roman roads, and we should visit its harbors with their forests of masts and their weather-beaten vessels that have battled with a thousand storms. We should make ourselves acquainted with its heterogeneous masses of people, the commingling of which resulted in a population of unusual vigor. Then we should trace back the annals of its history, and see how they were all shaped by an omnipotent hand for a bright and blessed chapter in the history of the race. The renowned men who were once the great leaders in their affairs should be brought up before us, and we should see them face to face.

We should enter more deeply still into the realities of the life of that land and people, and we should attain to sympathy with its warriors, its philosophers, its artists, its scholars, and its sages. We should explore the treasures of its art. We should awake to the grandeur of its mighty deeds. We should strive to appreciate the excellency of its civilization. We should analyze the perfections of its systems of philosophy and the steps of its human progress. We should trace the great currents of thought which, originating among its brightest minds, have flowed down through nations and ages until they have reached even to our days.

When we have thus become acquainted with the beautiful land of the seven churches and traced its brilliant history, we shall be able to appreciate the strong language of one who has imparted to these subjects a peculiar charm: "There is not a harbor, not a valley, not a plain or mountain, not a brook or dell of that classic soil but is associated with memorable names or exploits. The native land of Homer, the oldest of poets, and of Herodotus, the father of history—Ionia—has afforded many a scene for both. In fact, in its mythology and its history it is more characteristically Greek than Greece itself. Not only were much of the Hellenic mythology and traditions connected with its romantic glens: it was also the field of many of the noblest struggles and most brilliant victories of Greece. We need not recapitulate the many bloody fields of Asia Minor in which is traced the final establishment of the dominion of Rome over the East and the internecine struggles which were the prelude of Rome's decay. In this now almost unknown territory of ancient Greece three of the seven wise men in the early history of the world had their birth. Poetry, history, fable, and philosophy had each its father in this country. Among the wonders of the world it boasted its temple of Ephesus, its mausoleum in Caria, and its Colossus at Rhodes. The most wealthy of kings and the greatest of heroes rose in this region, and their tumuli remain still undisturbed."

When we shall have become acquainted with the land and its history, then shall we in some measure understand the providence which prepared it as the scene of the first great conflict of the gospel with the universal paganism of the world. Then shall we be prepared to assert, without fear of contradiction, that, next to Palestine, it is the most important land on earth as to its history and its influence upon the highest interests of mankind.

2. INFLUENCE ON THE WORLD'S HISTORY.

We study the introduction of Christianity into the land of the seven churches not only because it is a strangely fascinating study in itself, but also because these churches sent down an influence which is felt to this day in all the departments of Christian life. There are many and important elements of our Christianity which had their origin at that time. Moreover, taking a wider survey, there are features of our arts and literature and general culture which have come down to us from that favored country. Traces of the civilization which was developed there are to be found in the most cultivated lands at the present day.

What gives to everything that descends to us from that land and that age surpassing importance is, that there and then the very climax was reached of all that mere civilization, without the gospel, can do for mankind. For centuries the unaided powers of man had been climbing up, and there the highest attainment was reached. All that mere human power could do for the race was there seen, and now the gospel, as as an untried and all-potent element, enters the field, and a new destiny opens before the world. The sublime process can be better studied in Asia Minor than in Palestine, because there the religion of Jesus Christ is seen in its grand pre-eminence when placed side by side with the very highest of pagan attainments. Paganism had reached its best manifestations, and the religion of the Cross was established in its midst, amongst the same population, where its tendencies would have every opportunity of developing themselves, and its new influences were to issue forth for the weal of the race.

Everything pertaining to that land has stamped itself upon the subsequent ages. The library of Pergamos, for instance, became the type of thousands of other libraries which have adorned and elevated many another city. The temple of Diana, with its splendid marbles, prompted and guided in the erection of many of the most perfect structures which are even now admired. Every inch of parchment seen in our legal documents takes us back to the days when the tanners of Pergamos invented that most enduring of materials for valuable records. We never tread upon a Turkish carpet but we use the fabric that may remind us of the looms of Thyatira. Many an utterance of wisdom first heard from sages of that land has travelled down to us through the ages. The richest and most beautiful of poetry caught its first inspiration from the scenes of loveliness which adorned the home

of so many of its muses. The songs of its poets, the deeds of its warriors, and the wisdom of its sages have been the study and the admiration of scholars through long centuries.

Renowned land of Homer and Æneas, of Troy and Sardis, the beauty of its varying shores, the breezes of its hills, the verdure of its valleys, the perfume of its meadows, the brightness of its flowers, the windings of its streams, the wavings of its forests, and the romance of its fanes have furnished themes for many of the songs of the ages. All these are important as influencing the literature of all time, but they are as nothing compared with the richer influence of Christianity, the first developments of which are now to be the subject of our investigation. The orthodoxy of its Galatians, the missionary zeal of its Ephesians, the heroic martyrdom of its Pergames, the steadfastness of its Philadelphians, have exercised a commanding influence over the religion of all after-time. Every department of human well-being experiences the benign effect of the grand movement which planted the gospel there. In a measure much larger than is generally acknowledged that Heaven-directed movement has moulded our existing civilization.

### 3. LOCATION AND EXTENT OF THE COUNTRY.

The country of the seven churches was situated between the thirty-sixth and the forty-first degree of latitude, which would make it about three hundred and fifty statute miles from north to south. Its greatest breadth from east to west was about two hundred miles. Owing to the irregular contour of its sea-coast, it is difficult to estimate its area, which, however, may be regarded as about fifty thousand square miles. The area thus estimated is nearly that of the State of North Carolina, and almost exactly that of England exclusive of Wales. This is not the whole of the territory of Asia Minor, or Anatolia, which would probably amount to not less than two hundred and fifty thousand square miles, but that smaller portion of it which included the land of the seven churches. In that land the gospel was to commence an encounter with paganism which would be continued until the whole world should be subdued to the dominion of Jesus. A more interesting study there could not be than that of investigating how thoroughly it was adapted to that end.

The location of the country for that purpose was perfect. It was situated in the very heart of the most cultivated and influ-

ential portion of the earth. South of it lay the countries of Palestine, Egypt, and Northern Africa; on its east stretched away the historic lands of Chaldea, Persia, Media, and the unexplored regions of India; to the north were the vast regions which swept around Byzantium and formed the territory that now constitutes the whole of Eastern Europe; away to the west extended the beautiful islands of the Ægean Sea, the splendid lands of Greece, and of Rome, even then the mistress of empires. Encircled by these, how could the country of the seven churches be better located for sending influences abroad over them all?

Moreover, its location, its extent, its boundaries, its climate, and its fertility were all such as to mark it out as providentially intended for some grand purposes. Its northern latitude was nearly the same as that of the city of New York; its southern, almost the same as that which lies between Virginia and North Carolina; and its longitude nearly that of the fertile plains of Southern Russia. We can thus see that its geographical position was among the choicest of all earth's territory. Every view we take shows this more and more clearly. The short distances by which it was separated from the most important cities of the world rendered it easy to reach them all. From Ephesus, its greatest city, it was but one hundred and fifty miles to Byzantium (now Constantinople), two hundred to Athens, nine hundred to Rome, five hundred to Jerusalem, and sixteen hundred miles to London, even then growing to be a place of note. The world, as then known and civilized, lay around it, ready to receive every influence that might emanate from it.

*It is a very notable fact that Asia Minor for a long period bore very much the same relation to Greece that our America at first bore to Great Britain.* As Great Britain, being itself overcrowded, sent its surplus population to this land, where it could develop as was not possible in the mother country, so Greece sent the multitudes for whom it had no room at home to fill up the wide and fertile regions of Anatolia. Many of the bolder and more restless spirits sought a field more congenial than they could reach in the narrower territory of Athens or Corinth. Political partisans, defeated in Achaia or Lacedemonia, easily found a sphere for their ambition in the wider territory which extended from the Ægean waters to the heights of Taurus. The beautiful expanses of the Icarian Sea would carry them through the sunny islands of the Archipelago. The splendid cities of Smyrna, Ephesus, Metropolis, Magnesia, and Sardis would receive them, and

the fine old roads up the valleys of the Meander, the Caicus, and the Hermus would lead them back into the interior, to the rich table-lands and the fertile mountain-slopes. There was a significant providence in this selection of the land where the gospel was to make its first great inroad upon the regions of pagan darkness. We cannot but see that as Providence guided to the first great encounter of the gospel with paganism in the *central point in the ages of time*, so that same Providence directed to the beginnings of the triumphs of Christianity *in the very heart of the nations of mankind*.

### 4. THE COUNTRY DESCRIBED.

It is extremely difficult to define the boundary of this country toward the east, because it has varied from age to age, and because we must ever depend upon fancy in marking any frontier in that direction. For our purpose, however, it will be sufficient to take a line commencing at the old city of Nicomedia, now called Ismid, on the eastern point of the Sea of Marmora, and run it directly south to Attalia, on the Gulf of Pamphylia, and make it the eastern boundary. Such line must, of course, be imaginary, for it would take us now over some of the outlying spurs of Mount Taurus, now over the high table-lands of the interior, now over wide and deep lakes to which there are no outlets, and now through forests dense and solemn.

Taking this imaginary line as our limit toward the east, we have no difficulty with the boundaries in other directions. On the south we have the Mediterranean, with its well-known terminus in the Cilician and Carpathian Seas. The bold outline of the northern coast, its steep and lofty rocks, and its majestic headlands running out into the waves make it very easily understood. This boundary is, first, the Propontis, or Sea of Marmora, and beyond that, again, the Black Sea. In that direction the Bosphorus, the Sea of Marmora, and the Dardanelles are all well-known waters. Their shores, bold, deep, rocky, and running down in perpendicular cliffs, are easily described.

And the western boundary! its very names touch the finer chords in the heart of every classical scholar! Those names awaken the most vivid associations of the heroic deeds of the siege of Troy, of the glowing lines of Homer, of the thrilling adventures of Ulysses, and of the mystic fame of Æneas. Such associations arise before us at the mention of this Ionian coast. Besides that, probably, on this earth there is no more lovely spot than the

Grecian Archipelago, with its Asiatic shores, jagged and irregular in outline, filled with deeply-retreating bays, and cliffs among the most majestic and lofty in the world.

### 5. CONTOUR AND SURFACE.

Still more thoroughly would we become acquainted with that land connected with which are so many of the most vital interests of our race, so many of the most momentous events of time. We would sail along its coasts, we would trace the windings of its rivers, we would scale its mountain-peaks, we would wander through its groves, and we would follow its merchandise over old Roman roads, across beautiful plains, and through valleys renowned in song—valleys made famous by the marching of mighty armies or saddened by the bleeding feet of captives. We would contemplate its cities and fields as they once greeted the eye of the great apostle of the Gentiles, or as, in vision, they lay spread out before the entranced seer from the heights of his Patmos watch-tower.

Still our admiration of the land increases. The usual approach to it was from the west—through the island-studded waters of the Icarian Sea, the splendid Grecian Archipelago. It has been written without any exaggeration: "There is not, probably, any more lovely region than the Asiatic coast of the Mediterranean. That sea is in itself singularly full of charm and entertainment for the lover of nature and for the student of history. Its blue surface is studded with gem-like islands of all dimensions, from the kingdom of Sicily to the barren volcanic rock, most of them enriched with the choicest gifts of fertility, blooming with leaf and flower, and radiant with an almost eternal sunshine. Few violent tempests ever wrinkle its azure brow; its tides flow so gently as to be almost imperceptible; and such is the general aspect of tranquillity that it might more fitly be described as a vast inland lake. Its smiling waters, moreover, wash the shores of historic lands—of lands in old time the seat of mighty empires—Rome and Greece, Egypt and Carthage; and it has ever been the principal highway of the world's commerce, from that remote antiquity when the adventurous Phœnicians first furrowed it with the keels of their many-oared galleys to the present day, when it is the great route to England's Eastern dominions. In the belief of the ancients, it occupied the very centre of the globe, and hence they named it the Mediterranean, or mid-earth. It was 'the mighty ocean,' the 'many-sounding sea,' the 'raging

deep' of their poets, the realm of strange monsters and sea-gods, tritons and nereids, and regarded both by landman and mariner with an awe and a terror which to us moderns seem almost incomprehensible."

The very names of many of its islands are synonymes of beauty, renown, and heroism. There is a strange fascination in the words Lesbos and Samos and Chios. Save the British Islands, with their grandly eventful history, there are no lands adorning this earth's wide oceans so renowned as the islands of the Grecian Archipelago. Moreover, among all these, to the Christian, there is no island so dear as that of Patmos, down to which these messages were sent from throne of God.

### 6. MOUNTAINS.

As in almost all lands, the general aspect of this country is determined, in a large measure, by its mountain-chains and peaks. The variety of its climate and products, the beauty of its scenery, and the character of its cities and industries are all influenced by this peculiarity.

Beginning with the coast and running back to its eastern frontier, the whole country is thickly crowded by either isolated peaks or mountain-ranges. The chief feature is that of two almost parallel chains beginning in hills near the Ægean and running eastward the whole extent of the land until they are absorbed in the highlands of the Taurus in the interior. These two mountain-ranges, the Messogis and the Tmolus, give shape to the whole region. Whether in their own majestic heights rising to the region of perpetual snow, or in the grand waving forests which clothe their sides, or in the beautiful rivers by which they are drained, or in the fertile plains of the Cayster stream and the "Asian meadows" by which they are surrounded, or in the world-renowned cities that adorn their lower slopes,—no pen can do justice to those old mountains Messogis and Tmolus. There is no exaggeration in the description: "For the most part, we have a narrow strip of land bounded by lofty mountain-ranges and diversified by their projecting spurs, but occasionally expanding into broad smiling plains and deepening into exuberantly fertile valleys. While the distant peaks glitter with a permanent crown of ice and snow, around their base flourishes a belt of smiling garden-ground and purple orchards; higher up the mountain-side spreads a dark-green girdle of forests; from many a rocky recess trickles the tiny thread of a crystal stream; and on the projecting crags are perched the stone

walls of silent convents or the scattered huts of drowsy villages. Offsets from these mountains strike across the plain to the very margin of the sea, where they terminate in bold, romantic precipices bleached by incessant surf and spray."

The general features of the country are, first, beginning at the south, the river Meander, running from the eastern highlands and emptying into the Ægean Sea not far from the old city of Miletus; then, to the northward, the mountain-range of Messogis, running the whole length of the land; then the smaller river, Cayster, with Ephesus at its mouth; then the range of the Tmolus Mountains; then the larger river, Hermus, terminating in the Bay of Smyrna.

Surrounding these mountains and bordering these rivers are the plains of the Cayster, the "Asian meadows," and other valleys wonderful for beauty and fertility. Most of the cities of the seven churches are located near these mountains: four of them, Ephesus, Philadelphia, Sardis, and Smyrna, are at the bases of Tmolus; Laodicea is on the head-waters of the Meander; Thyatira is on a branch of the Hermus; and Pergamos on the little stream Caicus, farther to the south. These mountain-chains, intervening rivers, and surrounding plains, all running parallel from the highlands of Taurus in the east down to the shore of the Icarian Sea in the west, constitute the physical outline of the country.

### 7. VALLEYS, PLAINS, AND TABLE-LANDS.

One of the leading features of this country is the valleys or system of valleys which give it such beauty and fertility. There are three distinct chains of valleys running east and west. One is the chain which lines the course of the Meander through all its windings from the hot springs around Laodicea and Hierapolis down to the neighborhood of Miletus on the coast. This is the region from which so many of the warriors of Homer were gathered in the hosts around Troy. Next comes the valley of the Cayster, terminated at the sea by the city of Ephesus, and lying between the mountains of Messogis and Tmolus. This region is "the Asian meadow by the streams of the Cayster," celebrated by Homer. Even to the present time it is a district of great importance. It is "situated in the midst of the valley of the river Cayster, a broad and fertile region reaching one hundred and fifty miles farther into the interior, and drained by the Cayster, which empties into the Mediterranean at Ephesus.

The valley is the greatest fig-producing portion of Asia Minor, and, besides furnishing Smyrna with the supply of this fruit which has made it the greatest fig-market in the world, it sends forth a sufficient amount of other products to make it one of the richest agricultural regions in Asia." That splendid valley, lying between two great snow-capped mountains, with its fertile soil, its magnificent groves adorned with waving vines, its genial climate sweetened by breezes made fragrant by verdure and bloom, its romantic associations of other days, and its simple-minded inhabitants following their flocks, is a land in which there seems yet to linger some of the charms of Eden's happy morning. Then, third, there is the great valley of the Hermus, which we can trace back from where it opens into the Bay of Smyrna, eastward through fertile regions, through volcanic wastes, through streams once sparkling with golden sands, and through the cities of Smyrna, Magnesia, Adala, Sardis, and Philadelphia, until we reach its source amid heights originally thrown up by convulsions of the mighty earthquake.

Such are the valleys and plains between the mountains and along the great rivers of the land of the seven churches. On the summits of the mountains and on their higher slopes, as well as on the table-lands of the interior toward the east, all is different. There we seem to have reached another region. We cite this description of one who has traversed them: "We emerge, and come upon the central table-land of Asia Minor. The whole interior region of the peninsula may be correctly described by this term; for, though intersected in various directions by mountain-ranges, it is, on the whole, a vast plateau, elevated higher than the summit of Ben Nevis above the level of the sea. This is its general character, though a long journey across the district brings the traveler through many varieties of scenery. Sometimes he moves for hours along the dreary margin of an inland sea of salt; sometimes he rests in a cheerful, hospitable town by the shore of a fresh-water lake. In some places the ground is burnt and volcanic, in others green and fruitful. Sometimes it is depressed into watery hollows where wild swans visit the pools and storks are seen fishing and feeding upon the weeds; more frequently it is spread out into the broad open downs, like Salisbury Plain, which afford an interminable pasture for flocks of sheep. To the north the elevated plain stretches for a hundred miles from Mount Olympus to Mount Taurus. The southern portion of these bleak uplands was trodden by apostolic feet in their

great missionary tours. And the features of human life at that day were probably very nearly the same that they are now, as the scenery certainly was. There were dreary villages with flat roofs and cattle-sheds in the day, and at night an encampment of tents, a blazing fire in the midst, horses fastened around, and in the distance the moon shining on the snowy summits of Taurus."

### 8. RIVERS.

The rivers of a country have much to do with its aspect and character. They are the veins and arteries of its life. They give it beauty, fertility, and healthfulness. They drain it of its superabundant waters and irrigate its acres.

In Asia Minor there are two chief systems of rivers—those which flow into the Propontis and those which empty into the Ægean. It is only with the latter that we have now to do. These are especially famed in poetry, legend, and history. Only four of them are included in the land of the seven churches: Caicus, Hermus, Cayster, and Meander.

These four have several points so similar that they may well be classed together. They were all so famed in the great events of the past that they, as well as the country which they adorn, have a name that will last throughout all time. They all take their rise in the high table-lands of the interior and flow westward until they empty into the waters of the Icarian Sea. They all carry down the washings of the mountain-ranges, spread them over the lowlands of the coast regions, and so keep those regions in a splendid state of fertility. Three of them have each, opposite where they empty into the sea, an island that is equally renowned. Opposite the Caicus, and some forty miles out from its mouth, is the far-famed Lesbos; at about the same distance from the mouth of the Hermus lies the beautiful Chios; and over against the Cayster is the renowned Samos.

Whilst the four rivers are similar in some things and yield a remarkable symmetry to the country, each of them has a distinct character of its own. Beginning with the Caicus, the most northern of them, we have a comparatively small stream, whose chief distinction is that it has the city of Pergamos on it, thirty miles from its mouth, and that it flows through one of the most beautiful and fertile plains in the land. Next in order going southward, and about fifty miles from the Caicus, comes the Hermus. It is about two hundred miles long. It drains the greater part

of the country between Mount Tmolus and the mountain-chain which terminates in Mount Ida on the north. On either its main stream or its branches lie most of the cities of the seven churches. Smyrna is near its mouth, Sardis fifty miles from Smyrna, Philadelphia thirty miles farther inland, and Thyatira about the same distance on another branch. Southward again is the Cayster. This is the shortest river of the four. Its chief distinction is that at its mouth lies the city of Ephesus, and that it runs between the great mountain-ranges of Tmolus and Messogis and drains the rich, fertile, and romantic valley which separates them. The most southern of the four rivers is the Meander. In length it is about equal to the Hermus, and it is known in all times because of its windings, which have made its name, Meander, a synonym for what is winding and uneven. Near to its mouth was the old city of Miletus; nearly a hundred miles inland, on one of its branches, was Laodicea, one of the seven cities; ten or twelve miles farther to the north-eastward was Hierapolis; and about the same distance to the south-east the city of Colossæ, to which was addressed the Epistle to the Colossians.

### 9. CLIMATE.

Among the many things which give its pre-eminence to the land of the seven churches, not the least influential is its climate. In all the elements which go to make up the comfort and well-being of man there is no other climate superior to it. Says the distinguished traveler Macfarlane: "There is something in the scenery of this part of Asia Minor—something in the habits of the people and in every object one meets—that distinguishes it from all other regions of the earth. The sun is brighter and the air more balsamic than even Italy or Sicily; the mountains are far more sublime; the plains generally vaster; the rivers more picturesque; the forests wear a more religious gloom; the wild flowers are more numerous, more dazzling in color, of a richer fragrance, and a larger growth; the solitude is more intense."

Among the causes of the superior healthfulness of the country is its geographic position, removed alike from the extremes of heat and cold, from the chilling blasts of winter and the torrid beams of the equator. Another is the salubrious atmosphere of the sea which sweeps over it from nearly every quarter—now from the Carpathian Sea, now from the shores of the Euxine, and now from the waters of the Ægean. The very form of the land contributes to the same end—its steep ocean banks, its uni-

form declivity from the high interior down to the surrounding seas, and its well-formed water-shed which carries off the overflowings of every river and spring and drains every valley, and so saves from swamps and malarial influences. The result is a climate of surpassing healthfulness and a vegetation almost unequaled in its variety and abundance. As it has been well described: "The valleys and meadows of Asia Minor are full of rich vegetable mould which is brilliantly verdant, and watered by numerous streams that contribute to its freshness and abundance. Here the winter is so genial that the orange, the banana, and other tender trees flourish in the open air and are radiant with fruit and flowers even while the distant mountains whiten the sky with their thick mantles of snow." Amongst the fairest regions of earth there is scarcely another that will surpass this in all that contributes to the weal of man. Mountains with summits lying in regions of never-melting snow, valleys almost level with the ocean's bed, health-bearing waves laving every coast,—all conspire to produce a climate and a vegetation that no other region of earth can surpass. At some seasons it would seem that the climate had become positively faultless. The stranger who should then visit it would seem to have reached some region of earth where storms and malaria or evil of any kind never had or never could find an entrance.

### 10. PRODUCTIONS, FORESTS, AND MINES.

So great are now the neglect, waste, and misrule of the Ottoman government in that region of Asia that it is very hard to realize that at one time it was a garden of the Roman empire and an important granary of the world. So it was, and so it might be still. Because of the gradual descent from the highlands of the interior down to the Ægean shores, and of the washings of the mountains carried down by the rivers and valleys, the whole region of the low countries was one of surpassing productiveness. Add to this the geographical position, the genial sea atmosphere, and the skillful cultivation of an enterprising people, and it will not be wondered at that proconsular Asia should have been famed for its matchless fertility. The Byzantine ports sending out their vessels into every land, the harbor of Smyrna with ships deeply laden, and the port of Ephesus with its forest of masts floating the flags of every city of the world, told of a commerce which could have been sustained only by an agriculture of inexhaustible abundance. The great Roman roads, thronged with the pro-

duce of the mines, the forests, the fields, the looms, and the tanneries, wound around the bays, threaded the valleys, and stretched over the hills as great arteries of life and industry.

The land was possessed of every element that was calculated to give it agricultural and commercial prosperity. Its boundless forests of noble trees made Laodicea and other cities celebrated markets for lumber of every kind and quality. The streams of Sardis, flowing down from the heights of Tmolus, exposed the golden sands which gave to the kingdom of Crœsus its renown for wealth. The resins and other drugs of the country surrounding Philadelphia are still well known to commerce. The finest fig-producing lands in the world are those of the rich valleys that lie between its mountains and along its streams. The well-known purple dyes of Thyatira were carried by its merchants throughout all nations. The parchment from the tanneries of Pergamos furnished the material for many a library by which the literature of the world has been preserved. The gold and silver shrines from the manufactories of Ephesus, the marble-quarries of Mount Prion, the emery-quarries, the fisheries of the Selinusian lakes, the naval architecture of Smyrna, and the grain, fruits, and vegetables from thousands of farms,—it is scarcely possible to exaggerate the greatness of the industries of this land. In brief, it would seem that all the products of the world could be cultivated in that region. "Its river-banks and its delightful valleys are clothed with the olive and the vine, the myrtle and the laurel, the terebinth, the mastich, and the tamarind. Here, too, flourishes almost every variety of fruit-tree, the walnut, the apricot, the plum, and the cherry growing in complete forests. The cherry derives its name from the town of Cerasus, in whose neighborhood it grows abundantly. The majestic plane is also a native of Asia Minor; the oak which produces the gall-nuts used by the dyers is found everywhere; and the mountain-sides are heavy with the dense shadows of the savin, the juniper, and the cypress."

From all these facts it must be acknowledged that in indented coast-line, in salubrious climate, in life-imparting streams, in invigorating uplands, in fertile plains, in riches of the mine, the forest, the lake, and the field, in position among other civilized lands, and in wealth of historic associations this world has no nobler land than that of the seven churches.

### 11. CITIES.

Our present studies have to do chiefly with the cities in which the seven churches of the Apocalypse were located, but these were by no means the only important cities of that renowned land. Along the coast, up through the interior, on the mountain-slopes, and all over the plains there were many towns and cities famed in their day, and even to the present time of much importance. Every reader of history is familiar with the names of Troy and its great heroes, of Colossæ, to whose church the Epistle bearing that name was sent, of Antioch by the waters of the Meander, of Hierapolis among the volcanic hills, of Miletus, where Paul had his conference with the elders of the Ephesian church, of Halicarnassus and Colophon and Cumæ and Elæa and Erythræ and Assos and Adramyttium of classic renown, and of many other noble cities which adorned the land.

At present, however, we pass all these by to dwell on the *seven* whose names are embalmed in the heart of the Church. Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea are names well known to every child of God, because in them the gospel first took root in a land that was wholly pagan.

Merely in their physical or topographical aspect there are several things which are quite remarkable as to these cities. At first glance they form, in location, a sort of triangle, with Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamos constituting one side, Pergamos, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea the second, and Laodicea and Ephesus the third. In another view they may be considered as forming a circle commencing at Ephesus, and running first northward and then around until it returns down the Meander valley to the point of starting. Still another peculiarity is that we can trace two valleys—that of the Hermus and that of the Meander—opening upon the sea and thence running eastward into the interior, where they converge at the point of Philadelphia, and all the other cities either in these valleys or very near to them. Most of the cities cluster around the central mount, Tmolus. They were all situated on the great roads which ran along the coast or along the great water-courses and were connected in one system of thoroughfare.

All these cities had special advantages for agriculture and commerce. Some of them were located on or near the coast-line, which opened them up to the commerce of the world. Two of them, Smyrna and Ephesus, had amongst the finest harbors in the world,

and were most favorably situated for the navigation of that day. Most of them were on navigable streams. The greater part of them were accessible through the splendid roads, and connected thereby also with great fertile tracts of land, with the mines on the mountains, and with the rich lumber-regions. How important these cities actually were at the time of their greatest prosperity may be conjectured from the fact that their ruins are at this day great quarries out of which the marble of their former buildings is dug by thousands of workmen.

Some of these cities, situated in the centre of fine agricultural regions, flourished through the abundance of trade with the farmers who made them their markets. Others were on the great lines of traffic between the West and the crowded populations of the East. Such was the case with Laodicea and Sardis, which were constantly busy with merchants and caravans on their way through the great passes of Taurus. A single glance over the map will show how all the seven cities were located either at the leading ports of the Ægean or on the great thoroughfares into the interior or on the chief navigable rivers. Four of the seven were situated on the lower slopes of Mount Tmolus.

It might be in place here to take a fuller survey of each of the cities—to describe the outlines of its surroundings, its origin, its great names, and its present condition—but we postpone this until we come to dwell upon each city separately. At present we notice only those things which are common to them all. We state merely, in general, that "no cities were ever more favorably placed for prosperity and growth than those of the colonial Greeks in Asia Minor. They had the advantage of a coast-line full of convenient harbors and of a sea which was favorable to the navigation of that day, and by the long approaches formed by the plains of the great rivers they had access to the inland trade of the East."

Each of the cities had a clearly-defined appearance, history, and character of its own. Each had an individualism which distinguished it from all the others. For instance, Ephesus was the city of Diana, with its manufactory of her gold and silver shrines; Smyrna, then as now, was the cosmopolitan city, with a commerce extending throughout the world; Pergamos was the cathedral city, with its university also and its healing springs; Thyatira was the city of purple dyers and of carpet-weavers; Sardis was the city of the wealthy Crœsus and of gorgeous palaces; Philadelphia was the unpretending city of agriculture; and Laodicea was the city of bankers, of lumber-merchants, and of woolen-manufacturers.

We would not here dwell at any length upon any one of the cities, but we would revel in a picture which often meets the traveler's gaze in that land, and the leading features of which are constantly found in the scenery of that country. The view is not an imaginary one. We take our stand on an elevated spot on the outside of one of its old ruined cities. Close by, on the left, are the stupendous masses of broken marble of which, in old times, had been composed palaces, temples, theatres, and other resorts of pagan life. Beyond these is a dry valley where are seen the towering forms of poplars, and where the graceful boughs of the weeping willow are swayed by every breeze. Behind the valley again, rising up to meet the clouds, are the rugged peaks of weather-beaten mountains. Directly in front of us, in the central view, there lies, first, the beautiful placid waters of an inland lake, then a splendid plain with every charm of the most luxuriant vegetation, and then a town the houses of which are interspersed with poplar, cypress, and other trees clothed in their autumn coloring of beauty, and so numerous as almost to seem a forest. On the right there is another kind of scenery. All is wild, with lofty mountain-peaks belted by every color of vegetation, and all capped with perpetual snow.

### 12. ROADS.

The roads were an evidence of civilization which the Roman people left behind them wherever their conquests or their commerce led them to settle. Noble monuments they were of the skill and stability of Roman work. The first emperor, Augustus, erected in the forum at Rome a *golden milestone*. It stood as a symbol that there was the centre of the world. A network of roads extended from that point through the entire empire in every land. From Cadiz in Spain, through France, through Italy to the lands of the Danube or to the cataracts of the Nile, the traveler could journey over well-built roads, and find everywhere, at certain distances, "mutationes" for change of horses and "mansiones" for lodging at night. These roads were so many cords binding the conquered world to the mighty centre, Rome; they were channels for the impulses which streamed forth from the capital. Over these roads marched the legions to keep under control a subjugated world and to protect the boundaries; over them proconsuls and prætors went into the provinces to administer law and justice, and swift couriers bore the edicts of the emperor to the extreme circumference of the empire; over them commerce moved and

Romans of distinction journeyed to gain knowledge of the world; and over them, too, went the messengers of the gospel, bearing from city to city the joyful tidings of a manifested Redeemer of the lost world of mankind.

Traces of these old roads may even yet be found in provinces of Germany, in mountain tracts of Wales, and in the plains and uplands of Asia Minor; especially may they be seen in the splendid Appian Way, which from the very heart of the imperial city shoots straight as an arrow over the Apennines. Their very pavements are often found, and show how durable was the work which has now lasted for at least eighteen centuries.

In Asia Minor these roads seem to have radiated chiefly from Ephesus. Their remains can even at the present be traced, one southward to Miletus, over which the elders of the Ephesian church hastened to meet Paul on his journey to Jerusalem; one in the opposite direction, northward along the windings of the coast to Smyrna and onward to Pergamos; one along the valley of the Meander to Laodicea, Iconium, and other cities, and thence through the populous regions of the interior uplands; and one eastward through the passes of Tmolus to Sardis, with cross-roads to Philadelphia and Thyatira, over Mount Taurus to Galatia, and intersecting other great roads from Byzantium to Cilicia, and on still farther east to the country of the head-waters of the Euphrates. These old Roman roads are wonderful monuments of that great empire, not only for the reasons mentioned, but also because when the "fulness of the time" had come they aided in a material degree the diffusion of Christianity. With men they were intended to meet the demands of civilization, but with God they were a highway prepared for the advent of his Son.

### 13. THE PEOPLE.

The population of Asia Minor was originally composed of four distinct elements—namely: Greeks from the other side of the Archipelago; Orientals from the lands beyond the Euphrates; Gauls from the wandering tribes who had settled on the southern coasts of the Black Sea; and a few Jews living in every city. Thus it came to pass that Greeks, Orientals, Gauls, and Jews each contributed their own element to make up the character of that mixed population. The Greeks brought their refinement, culture, and gayety; the Orientals, their superstition, deceitfulness, and skill in handicraft; the Gauls, their energy and their reverence for higher

powers; and the Jews, the same traits that mark them wherever they are found the world over and the ages through.

As is generally the case, the commingling of so many distinct nationalities resulted in a people possessed of a character more elevated than that of either of the constituent elements. No doubt there was a special providence in this, which prepared a people, cultured, bright, energetic, reverential, and elevated, that could properly receive the gospel which was there imparted to them. Their numbers, as well as their advancement in all the elements of civilization, were seen in the multitude, the elegancy, and the importance of their cities. Moreover, a population gathered out from so many, such diverse, and such distant countries would undoubtedly keep up their interest in their fatherlands, and would be the very people to spread over the world the tidings of redemption by the Son of God.

This diversity in the origin of the people in the land of the seven churches must also have imparted a cosmopolitan character to the form in which they received the gospel. Their diverse characteristics and traits of mind and modes of life must have led them to look upon Christianity, given to them when pagans, in all its various lights and modes of application to any country. This would tend to give it a breadth and comprehensiveness of application which in those early days would be highly important.

Moreover, this collection of such diverse nationalities into one country would bring together all the idol-gods of their worship and involve them in the general overthrow which Christianity would effect upon the whole world of idolatry. These nationalities came from every quarter, north, south, east, and west, and they brought with them their pagan deities. They enthroned Diana at Ephesus, Homer at Smyrna, Æsculapius at Pergamos, Apollo at Thyatira, Cybele at Sardis, Bacchus at Philadelphia, and Jupiter at Laodicea, and they fell down in worship before these unclean deities until the pure spirit of Jehovah unthroned them and in these seven epistles wrote the doom of all idolatry.

Still another result followed this collecting and commingling in one country of the thousands from the most highly cultivated nations of the world. It prepared a people of the most exalted character for the reception of the gospel. From this it came to pass that Christianity entered there on its victorious career with the highest type of Christian life—that the Christian life there developed had a vigor and an energy before which the effete forms of

idolatry were compelled to yield. It was so animated that its leading movements were most successful even at the first.

The union of so many nationalities in the field of the gospel's first and great encounter with paganism had also the effect of arousing in behalf of the truth elements of power which otherwise had been unknown. Peculiarities of its energy were thus evoked at once, which otherwise would have required long time for their development. Through this it resulted that its first movements had a freedom, a buoyancy, and a daring which astonished men and gave it a success which the world could not understand. As we can now easily comprehend, every energy of the gospel would be developed, every power called forth, every blessed tendency manifested, every exalting influence brought out, every purifying element demonstrated to the full, amid such a population as was then collected in Asia Minor.

### 14. PECULIARITIES OF THE COUNTRY.

This country had many things in common with other countries, but it had also several which were peculiar to itself. Among these noteworthy things we place first its remarkable likeness to the Holy Land where the Son of man was born, lived, and died. Almost all travelers are impressed with this, and speak of it in strong terms. One of them especially, McGarvey, thus depicts the similarity: "I was struck, wherever I went in Asia Minor, with the striking likeness between its natural features and those of Palestine. Its seasons are the same—a short wet season and a long dry one; its temperature is only a little lower; its vegetation, both natural and cultivated, is almost identical. It gives constant evidence, too, of having once been, like Palestine, a very rich and splendid country. One would not have to read Greek history, after seeing this country, to know something of what it has been, as he would not have to read the Bible after seeing Palestine to know that it is far, far from its former glory." This is a fact that is worthy of special attention. It becomes significant when we consider that Asia Minor is, as it were, the second birthplace of Christianity. In Palestine it began its career amid the Jewish world, in Asia Minor amid the pagan world. There were doubtless other providential causes why this country was selected for that movement of the kingdom. Antioch was not chosen, because the Jewish element was there so strong; nor Athens, because the pride of its philosophy, arts, and wisdom made it an unfitting soil for the humiliating doctrines of the

Cross; nor Rome, because it was so far away from the knowledge and influences of the gospel. Not any one of these places was selected for the second and grand departure of the kingdom of our Lord amid the heathen nations of the world—but Asia Minor, because it adjoined the land where the truth as it is in Christ Jesus was first made known; because the leading pagan deities were there concentrated in their pride; because the people were bright and energetic, and so qualified to give it a fitting reception; and because from there, as from a great centre, it would send out its influences through the habitations of mankind.

A second remarkable thing about Asia Minor was its singularly advantageous situation and favorable coast-lines with reference to its intercourse with other nations. It is a well-understood fact that any country which has a coast much indented by bays, estuaries, and other windings always has advantages superior to those of other lands. Look at Great Britain and all Western Europe, as well as our own eastern shores, as illustrations of this. Especially look at these in contrast with the whole African coast, which is almost without bay or bend or inlet, and then contrast the countries. There could not well be a more thorough interlocking of land and sea than through the whole extent of the Levant. We have but to glance at the Icarian Sea, the Propontis, and the Euxine waters; at the gulfs of Pamphylia, of Doridis, and of Smyrna; at the bays of Adramyttium, of Iassus, and of Glaucus; at the estuaries of the Hermus, the Cayster, and the Scamander; and at the inlets of Mitylene, of the Hellespont, and of the Bosphorus. The whole coast is made up of these renowned and beautiful points of commingling of land and water. By this peculiar shape the coast-line is extended to a fourfold length and the whole land laid open to the commerce of the world.

Another most remarkable thing as to this land, to which we have already alluded, but which in this connection should receive very great attention, was the concentration in it of all the leading pagan deities in their greatest attractions. We cannot look upon this as an accidental thing, but as one providentially arranged. Why was it that, in a space of territory so small, so many of the most influential objects of pagan worship should have their seat of empire and their central temples? Why was it that the headquarters, the capitols, of the worship of Diana, Æsculapius, Cybele, Apollo, Jupiter, and Bacchus should all be in

those seven cities so near together? Was it not that they—the pagan deities—should all receive a deadly blow in the gospel's first, fresh, vigorous onslaught upon the pagan apostasy?

Another peculiarity of this country, and one which will aid in comprehending some of the allusions of the Epistles, is that it is, and eminently was, the land of earthquakes. These terrible visitations of Providence seem to be largely confined to certain localities. They are experienced chiefly in the regions adjacent to the Pacific Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea. This is one of the most forbidding aspects of the country of the seven churches. With perfect truthfulness it has been thus described: "Within a very short distance of the coast we find vast volcanic tracts, and everywhere strange contortions of strata, convulsions and intrusions of fiery and volcanic rocks. One district—that to the east of Sardis—is named the Katakaumene, or burnt-up, being, in fact, like an ocean of lava which had been suddenly petrified in a storm, craters starting up as sharp and black as though they had but yesterday belched forth their liquid fires. These extinct volcanoes explain also the continuous earthquakes which have devastated Ionia from the earliest period of its history to the present day."

We notice only one other peculiarity as connected with the land where these seven churches lay, and we notice it because of its possible bearing upon the religious character of the people. Connected with its many idolatries and false religions, it was a land abounding in strange superstitions. This characteristic was so common that we should give it attentive study. It is certainly very remarkable indeed that some of the most brilliant minds that the world has ever seen should have been slaves to the most absurd credulity. An incident told by an ancient historian of a discussion between Alexander the Great and his noted general Parmenio, just before the siege of Miletus, throws a curious light upon the power which superstition held over the minds of even the most enlightened and least bigoted heathen. The question was whether Alexander with his Macedonians should risk a sea-fight against the far superior Persian fleet. On the sea-shore near the rear of the Macedonian ships Parmenio had seen an eagle, and thereupon presaged victory. But Alexander refused to admit this inference from the omen. As an eagle had been seen, it was to him a presage of victory; but as it was seen *over the land*, the victory would be of his *land* troops, who should by operations on shore overcome the Asiatic fleet. Strange, how men will sink

down to the most groveling thoughts when they know not Him who is the true Light of the world.

### 15. HISTORY.

The partly real and partly mythic scenes connected with the siege of Troy were the events which first brought Asia Minor into a prominent place in history. In those early days it was most intimately connected with Greece, of which it was almost an integral part. It has been well remarked, "The connection of Asia Minor with Greece was as ancient as it was close. From the earliest to the latest periods of the national history of these lands it is impossible to separate their annals." The inhabitants of both countries were to a great extent one people. The lands were almost the same, for they were connected by the many islands of the Archipelago. Those lovely islands, "Thasos, Lemnos, and Samothrace, connected with the wild, mysterious worships of the Greeks; Ithaca, the reputed dwelling-place of Ulysses; Cyprus and Rhodes, so much renowned in history; and Delos, the legendary birthplace of Apollo and Diana,"—these islands bound the two lands together and gave opportunity for a constant intercourse that was most important in its influence upon both. Because of the great number of these islands, and because of the indented nature of the coasts on both sides of the Archipelago, the early inhabitants of both lands were a seafaring people. Nor is it to be wondered at that piracy was a crime not uncommon among them.

But the important historical fact is that at a very early age there was a constant migration from Greece to the Asiatic shores, arising from the proximity of the two lands, from the attractive islands which, like stations, lay between them, and from the maritime spirit which kept the people at all times ready for adventures. The early emigrants from Greece were the most enterprising of her people, insomuch that their energy, their endurance, their habits of navigation, as well as the superior soil of their new home, all contributed to give far greater prosperity to these first colonists in Asia Minor than was enjoyed by the Greeks who remained at home. Their Asiatic home, at first called Ionia, soon became the favored land of the age. It was, in fact, the America of Greece, the region into which was naturally drawn not only all the superabundant population, but also the more bold, restless, and ambitious spirits.

The first immigrants soon organized themselves into colonies, and these colonies, twelve in number, became confederated into a government of great influence. The meetings of that league were held in a temple erected for the purpose on Mount Mycale, near Ephesus. Among the great powers that have flourished on earth, history will never lose sight of Ionia. Of the whole land most appropriately has it been written: "Asia Minor, though now so fallen and obscure that for centuries it has dropped out of the world's history, must yet ever be regarded as the second cradle both of civilization and of Christianity. It was the first region colonized by Greek settlers, and the founding of its maritime cities carries us back into the era of myth and fable soon after the fall of Troy."

Ages passed away; the sway of the Greek colonies came to an end and another great power appeared in Asia Minor. Three hundred years before the coming of our Lord, Alexander became the conqueror of the world. With other nations, Asia Minor fell before his triumphant arms. But the reins of universal rule were not long in his hands. After his untimely death the dominion over Asia Minor fell into the hands of his great generals Antigonus and Eumenes, and from the control of one successful general to another, until it became settled in the dynasty of Attalus, and continued therein for several generations. This was probably the period of the greatest glory of Asia Minor, in which Pergamos was its capital, and its rulers were among the most eminent men whose names adorn the annals of that land.

Still the ages roll on, and after a while in Asia Minor the sway of the Greeks has passed away, the dominion of Alexander and his great generals is no more, the dynasty of Attalus has run its course, and the all-conquering arms of Rome are acknowledged here, as elsewhere the world over. But many a bloody conflict had first to be waged. The Roman armies were victorious, but it was a victory reached over many a sanguinary field. City after city had to be subdued, and power after power vanquished, before the sway of Rome was acknowledged. That power was at length supreme, but it also came to an end. With the decay of the Roman power the influence of the land also declined.

For four hundred years Asia Minor was for the most part nominally under the eastern empire, and Christianity prevailed; yet it suffered terribly from the repeated inroads of Persians and Saracens till, in A. D. 1074, Soliman, the Turkish sultan, finally

rent the whole of Asia Minor, the cradle and nurse of so many churches, from the sceptre of the Christian empire. Ages of war, discord, luxury, and corruption had already done their work. The wealth of Lydia, the arts of the Greeks, the splendor of the Augustine age, existed only in books and ruins. The divinity of our Lord was blasphemed in the same temple where it had been pronounced an orthodox dogma. Laodicea was made a great Moslem centre. All the churches of Asia were profaned. The Greek Christians could exercise their religion only on the hard conditions of tribute and servitude. Their daughters were everywhere at the mercy of the Turks, and their sons were compelled to conform to Mohammedanism.

Such was the condition of the land of the seven churches through the many ages until the era of the Crusades, when new waves of influence agitated the Christian world. The depths were stirred, and the whole moral world felt the power of an agitation that must reach to every fibre and element of society and make an impression that never could be effaced.

In the mean time, however, it ought not to be lost sight of that the increase in wealth and refinement was more rapid in Asia Minor than it was in Greece or any other country. In architecture, sculpture, painting, and poetry there was no other land save Corinth that could equal this. Its inhabitants, the Ionians, were the first people in the world to cast metal statues. The greatest masters of painting and statuary were from this land. In poetry and history they had no equals. So, too, in philosophy—the oldest and best school was the Ionian.

### 16. GREAT EVENTS.

It may safely be said that many of the most influential events of antiquity occurred in this land of the seven churches. Here the greatest conquerors contended for the supremacy. Here were fought the fiercest of the battles of the Medes and the Persians with the half-savage Scythians. Here were waged the bloody wars of the Greeks with the numberless hordes of Persia. Here the Romans and the Parthians joined in deadly contest. Here it was that, in succession, Alexander the Great and the Roman legions struggled for the supremacy of the world. It was on the shores of Asia Minor that the sanguinary scenes of Grecian history were witnessed—that the despotism of Persia met its great and deadly overthrow—that the internecine contests of Athens and

Sparta for supremacy came to a mortal crisis—that the galleys which had swept the Icarian Sea joined in deadly combat and dyed the harbor with the richest blood of Greece—that expeditions with murderous intent forced their way up beautiful rivers and over smiling plains. Almost every part of the land and every period of its history was marked by some event that made it memorable.

This land also witnessed great ecclesiastical movements which left their impress upon the kingdom of Christ. Here were the scenes of important councils of the Church in which great theological questions were discussed and settled for all after-ages. Here the Council of Nice, convened by the emperor Constantine A. D. 325, achieved undying fame by its condemnation of the Arian heresy and its settlement of the doctrine of the Trinity. Here was held the Council of Laodicea, which about A. D. 360 took most important steps toward the establishment of the canon of Scripture. Here also was held, A. D. 431, the Council of Ephesus, which condemned and wellnigh extinguished the heresy of Nestorius.

Here too, in the misty ages of antiquity, were witnessed the thrilling scenes of the siege of Troy, whose heroic history comes down to us adorned by the genius of the prince of poets with a beauty and a power that have influenced the destiny of nations. Were there no other results descending from it, the influence of the siege of Troy upon the literature of the world could scarcely be overestimated. It furnished the theme for the most noble of all the uninspired poetry of earth—poetry which has stopped short only of the spiritual and the eternal. The great epic of Homer created language; it has awakened ideas and formed images that have been wrought into the poetry of the world. It has given a strange pleasure to millions of the most cultivated intellects; it has been the class-book of the school and the college; it has been the chosen instrument by which the brightest minds have been polished and strengthened. Take the Iliad, with the bravery of its heroes, the wisdom of its sages, and the grandeur and beauty of its poetry, out of the literature of the world, as it has permeated that literature in its every element, and its charm would be gone.

### 17. GREAT MEN.

The great men of earth have left behind them names which never can be effaced. They have adorned with a halo of glory

the very lands in which they dwelt, and which the lapse of the ages can render only more and more effulgent. Thus has it been in a super-eminent degree with this land of the seven churches.

It was in this land that, before the advent of our Lord, Homer composed those marvelous poems which centuries have but served to exhibit in their richer treasures. In this land lived at least three of the "seven wise men" whom all antiquity agreed to honor, namely: Thales of Miletus, Pittaccus of Mitylene, and Bias of Priene, author of the famous rebuke to the impious sailors calling on their gods in a tempest: "Be quiet, lest the gods discover that you are here." We have already spoken of Crœsus, the most wealthy of monarchs, of Attalus, one of the greatest of kings, and of Herodotus, the father of history. We might add the names of Apollodorus, the physician, of Apelles, the greatest of painters, of Praxiteles, the greatest of sculptors, and of many others who have immortalized their country.

And what a glorious array did this land behold of holy men who lived near to the days of our Lord and drew their doctrines fresh from his teaching, who suffered, and many of whom endured the most cruel deaths, for that heavenly Master whom they loved so well! For ever honored must be that country associated with which are the names of John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, of Bartholomew, one of the twelve, of Paul, the great apostle of the Gentiles, of Timothy, the chosen companion of Paul, of Polycarp, the faithful martyr, of Ignatius, of Papias, and of many others whose names are also written in the Book of Life.

### 18. CELEBRATED OBJECTS.

Among the many mighty structures erected by the skill of man, there were a few which were grander, more awe-inspiring than any to be found in Asia Minor, but more celebrated there were none. Here were three of the famed "wonders of the world." Beyond doubt, the descriptions of these marvelous objects which have come down to us were greatly exaggerated. At the same time, however, to have called forth such admiration at the time when they were in their perfection, and for their renown to have survived throughout so many centuries, there must have been something in them of surpassing grandeur. These "seven wonders" were the pyramids of Egypt, the Pharos of Alexandria, the walls and hanging gardens of Babylon, the statue of the Olympian Jupiter, the mausoleum of Artemisia, the Colossus of Rhodes, and the temple of Diana at Ephesus.

There is also a very humiliating distinction in the fact, already stated, that so many of the greatest of the pagan gods had the seat of their worship in the cities of the seven golden candlesticks. The world-honored shrine of Diana was in Ephesus; the home of the worship of the deified Homer in Smyrna; the great temple of Æsculapius in Pergamos; the shrine of Apollo in Thyatira; the capital of Cybele, the mother of gods, in Sardis; the centre at which were gathered the devotees of Bacchus in Philadelphia; and the leading cultus of Jupiter in Laodicea.

A more honorable distinction was it that the greatest library in the ancient world, save that of Alexandria, was located in Pergamos, and that the manufacturing of books caused the necessity which led to the invention of parchment.

### 19. THE GRACIOUS PROVIDENCES INVOLVED.

There are many other things concerning this land on which we could dwell with interest and profit. We might study its civilization, developed out of the highest culture of Greece, rendered more perfect from the elements imparted from Oriental and other nationalities, and culminating in institutions which the world has never since surpassed. Or we might describe its influence upon every department of our own intellectual and social life. But all this we must pass over, and fix our closing thought upon that amazing providence which so ordered the affairs of the world that the kingdom of our Lord should in this land commence its victorious career over all other kingdoms and powers of mankind.

The marvels of God's providence over human affairs can be studied in connection with this subject in a manner that is most impressive. The great object to be accomplished was the successful embarking of Christianity amid the paganism of the world. The place must be central, and such as could easily communicate impulses affecting it to adjacent lands. The people must be intellectual, bright, and enterprising, so that the truths imparted to them could be promptly received and appreciated. All these ends were perfectly accomplished by that providence which we can now so easily interpret. The work was complicated, but it was all carefully wrought out. Every apparently tangled thread was managed so as to perfect the fabric that Deity was elaborating. Then, after all the work was finished by the setting up of the kingdom of Christ amid the pagan strongholds of Asia Minor,

we can clearly understand its perfection. We can see the infinite goodness of the divine King in determining to provide such blessings for mankind, his wisdom in planning it out so perfectly in every part, his power in carrying it forward through every complication and obstacle, and his greatness in all the footsteps which led steadily upward to its decreed and glorious end.

# CHAPTER II.

## THE GOSPEL'S FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH PAGANISM.

### 1. GREAT RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT IN ASIA MINOR.

THE establishment of Christianity in Asia Minor was one of the most important movements that our world has ever witnessed. It changed the whole moral and religious character of that renowned country. It was the commencement of a vast enterprise which was destined to reach the whole family of mankind and to continue in its effects until the end of time.

Many lines of providences had been preparing the way for it and indicating the greatness of the coming change. On the one hand, the assembling of such diverse nationalities in that land, the awakening of thought which followed, the condition of things resulting from the commingling of so many of the most attractive forms of idolatry; on the other hand, the return to their homes in Asia Minor of some who had witnessed the descent of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost, the gathering of the Church in Jerusalem, the drifts of population which carried so many of the first converts to those far-famed shores,—all these and many other significant events indicated that God had vast designs in store which would soon be developed.

In the movement itself everything was instructive and full of meaning. In it were fulfilled many of the predictions of the Sacred Scriptures. In all its essential elements it was clearly the setting up of Christ's kingdom. It was the beginning of the pre-ordained conquest of the world for Jesus—a conquest which is to culminate in his taking the throne over all the nations and in his being exalted "far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come." *It was the first great, earnest, well-ordered, and successful encounter of Christianity with paganism.*

This religious movement had additional meaning in that it exhibited on a grand scale the nature, tendency, and power of the gospel. The effects of Christianity were here made known in a manner that must have impressed all thoughtful men. On a wide field the gospel here exhibited what it could do. This event brought

to light that power in Christianity the full development of which would convert the world

Still further, it would serve as the model missionary enterprise for all after-ages. It would accomplish this purpose perfectly, inasmuch as it was under the direction of inspired men. It had vast significance from the fact that it was the chief scene, field, and work of the two apostles Paul and John.

Then too, as a model for all time to come, it was the first grand and typical revival. In it was seen what the truth as it is in Christ Jesus, when applied by the power of the Holy Ghost, is capable of effecting in any country or age.

Take it all in all—in the preparations made for it, in its own nature, in the lessons it taught, in the purposes it developed, in its immediate results as well as its lasting effects—it was, without a question, one of the most important movements that the Church of God on earth has ever experienced. The spirit of Christianity was here manifested in a sudden extensive and decisive way, so that the world might ever afterward know what that spirit is. It was a shock and warning to Satan, an encouragement to angels, a premonition of the doom of the kingdom of darkness, and a pledge to the Church and friends of Christ. Christians have not kept these momentous events in that prominent place which they deserve. Their vast importance has been overlooked.

### 2. THE ENTERPRISE PECULIAR AND FOR A PECULIAR END.

Every view we take of it makes it more and more manifest that the planting of the Church in Asia Minor was no common event in the annals of the kingdom. It was one of those epoch-making movements which leave their impress on the world. So momentous was it in the sight of Him who is the great Head of the Church that in its inauguration and furthering both the beloved disciple John and the great apostle Paul were appointed to spend an important portion of their public ministry. All seemed providentially ordered so as to provide for the first typical experiment of the gospel upon paganism. The great Head of the Church was manifestly preparing the way for something extraordinary.

The setting up of Christ's kingdom upon earth was an event so transcendently important that we cannot dwell on it too much or use language too strong. No event is set forth in the Scriptures more impressively in connection with Christ's work of redemption. It stands out very prominently in the prophecies, as when in Daniel

it is represented as the stone cut out of the mountain without hands, and expanding and crushing out all opposition until it filled the whole earth. After Babylon should have had its day, and then Persia and Greece and Rome, it should occupy their place and extend far beyond their utmost reach, realizing the universal empire for which they strove in vain, and enter upon a dominion that would never end. Christ also did himself constantly dwell on that dominion among men which he had come to set up. Nothing, save his death for the sins of men, seemed in his estimation so important. It formed the staple of his teaching before his crucifixion, and it was "of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God" that he spake to his disciples during the forty days that followed his resurrection.

It is because of the vast importance of this kingdom that we have in the second and third chapters of Revelation an epitome of its first reception among men. After it had been set up for about sixty-three years in the important cities of Asia Minor, we have in these chapters addresses from the glorified Christ himself to the seven churches as representatives of all the rest. In these addresses reference is made to the fortunes of that part of the kingdom—its reception of the gospel, its conquests and its failures, its trials and its victories, its glory and its shame. It will be seen at a glance how important for all after-times is this inspired description of the kingdom as it first came in contact with the Gentile world.

There could not have been for this purpose a more appropriate land. Its inhabitants were a people of unusual energy and enterprise. The whole region was filled with a large population, and it had many great cities such as these seven. Among these cities and the population of which they were the centres the gospel at first spread rapidly. As it came among the various communities it experienced various receptions and had a varied history. The truth as it is in Christ Jesus was there brought into contact with all kinds of opposition, and so its various qualities were at first made known. In a very few years after its first planting the effects it would produce were manifested for all future guidance.

The results in those sixty-three years were very different in the different churches of the seven that were selected as examples. Some of them were faithful amid all kinds of opposition and trials; their members, out of love to Christ, were ready to lay down their lives in a martyr's death. Some had become guilty of apostasy. Some had fallen into gross errors by which the

glory of the Cross had been almost utterly effaced. Some had grown so lukewarm as to be odious in the sight of God. Some were wellnigh dead.

This experience of the kingdom of Christ during its first sixty-three years in the land of the seven cities was given for the warning of believers in all other times and places. Seven of the chief cities were selected as specimens of all, and this portion of Scripture records the experiment of the gospel in them. The varied fortunes of the several churches would be ever recurring in the history of other churches all the centuries through. The dangers and evils which those churches encountered would be ever rising up to meet others. Our Lord set up this beacon at that early day that the Church might behold it all through the stormy centuries, and so be ever warned and directed.

The setting up of Christ's kingdom at that time was an event of unequaled moment among all the stirring scenes of human history. Its glory was unspeakably great in that the blessings which it brought to mankind would never be exhausted, and in that, in their sweep, they would embrace the whole family of mankind. It was the beginning of a war the final issue of which will be the utter overthrow of Satan and the perfect triumph of Immanuel.

We may well imagine that such an undertaking would awaken intense interest throughout every realm of the universe to which it was made known. No being in heaven, in earth, or in hell but was interested in the undertaking.

### 3. ORIGINAL RELIGIOUS STATE OF THE LAND.

It is needful that we should know the moral and religious condition in which the gospel found the people, in order that we may appreciate the change that Christianity wrought among them, the forms it first assumed, and the tendencies it early manifested. We must keep in mind that the churches to which these messages were sent were the growth of only about sixty years. Three leading forms of religion were then in the land, and the commingling of these tended to impart a peculiar type to the Christianity of the churches that were there gathered. There was, first and most influential, the Grecian idolatry, with its splendid ritual, its forms of beauty, its charming mythology, and its romantic associations. Then came the Oriental idolatry from the regions of the Indus, weird, sombre, unsightly, dark, and gloomy. Lastly, there was the limited element of Judaism. Even then the Jews were wanderers in all

lands, and much of the commerce of the day was in their hands. They were to be found in influential numbers in all the cities of Ionia.

Not only were the Grecian and the Oriental forms of idolatry to be found, but it is also a noteworthy fact that subordinate kinds of idol-worship prevailed in the cities. Each one of the seven cities had its own tutelary divinity and its own corresponding cultus. It could not have been a merely accidental thing that the gospel encountered the chief idols of the heathen world in these cities. This fact is one which is deeply impressive. It would not be mere fancy if we should attempt to show that these cities were selected, among other reasons, as being the capitals of the worship of the most renowned idols. Further still, is it not more than probable that, as in most similar cases, many causes conspired for the selection of these cities rather than any others? The facts that they were the scenes of the missionary labors of most eminent apostles, that they represented various types of the piety of that day, that they were specimens of early tendencies in the Church, good and bad, and now that they were the homes of the most renowned idols of the heathen,—all these, no doubt, conspired to decide upon the choice of these seven churches as those to which the messages of the King were sent.

As said, there is scarcely a doubt but that each of these seven cities was celebrated as the home of some renowned heathen deity; and among the many marvelous things we encounter in the study of these messages, this is not the least impressive. As to Ephesus, there is no question but that its tutelary deity was Diana, whose renowned temple adorned the city. It is almost equally certain that Smyrna had as a demigod Homer, the more than god of poetry. Next comes Pergamos, celebrated from the earliest age for its temple or collection of temples devoted to the worship of Æsculapius, the god of the healing art. After this we come to Thyatira, the principal deity of which was Apollo, introduced by the Macedonians. Undoubtedly, the deity of Sardis was Cybele, the mother of Jupiter, the burning of whose temple by the Persians was the occasion of so many disasters, and whose worship was so renowned in all that region. After Sardis we have Philadelphia, whose great idol was Bacchus. This is evident from the facts that Philadelphia was the great market of the wine-region of Asia and that the head of Bacchus is on all the coins that are found in the neighborhood. The last of the seven, as placed in the Apocalypse, is Laodicea, "the city of Jupiter," as it was named by

its old Greek founders. With almost absolute certainty, then, may we name Ephesus as the city of Diana, Smyrna of Homer, Pergamos of Æsculapius, Thyatira of Apollo, Sardis of Cybele, Philadelphia of Bacchus, and Laodicea of Jupiter.

It is, then, certain that these were the capitals of the great heathen gods of the land. The country itself was the home of idolatry, and these were the cities in which it had its strongholds. It was given over to heathen worship. Everywhere it bore some dark spot indicative of hostility, universal and deadly, to the one only and true God, the only Jehovah. Go through the whole land, from city to city and from village to village, and you would have found nothing but idolatry—idolatry in its most attractive and in its most repulsive forms. You would find here the highest culture of the age, or of almost any age, on its face in the dust before the image of Diana—here a synagogue of the Jews with the most formal and heartless service of the one, only true God—here thousands of ignorant wretches trembling in awe before a band of vile impostors and deluded by the tricks of a company of cheating jugglers—here the most foul, the most dark, and the most degrading rites in the impure groves of Pergamos and Thyatira—here lewdness, falsehood, and the most debauching tendencies of every kind calculated to degrade and deprave—here a worship and a shrine for everything that bore the name of a god excepting the everlasting God of truth and holiness—nowhere truth; nowhere purity; nowhere what is exalting to man; nowhere what was honoring to the Creator—everywhere the clearest evidence that the heart is desperately wicked because desperately hostile to God.

The whole land was covered with idolatry or wretched Judaism. Take Ephesus as a sample of the prevailing worship, for its condition was a good specimen of all. It was devoted to the worship of the unsightly monster Diana—not even the beautiful, the graceful Artemis of the Grecian mythology. Though that city was at the very head of the activities and refined art of the age, it was steeped in the most degrading superstition. It groaned and trembled under the mystic terror of the black art. The fact that one of its leading industries was the manufacture of little silver shrines of its unsightly idol Diana tells the sad story of its degradation. Its great temple was its glory, one of the wonders of the world, and yet that fane was the scene of revels the most foul and loathsome. At that age it was probably the most elegant city of the world, and yet its greatest boast was that it was "*the temple-sweeper of*

*Diana*." What was this but the most perfect civilization of the age devoted to the most degrading idol-worship?

### 4. ANTE-PAULINE MOVEMENTS.

It is interesting to trace the very first footsteps of those who "brought good tidings, that published peace, that brought good tidings of good things, that published salvation." At first several different influences were awakened as harbingers of the movements that were soon to change the whole moral aspect of the country.

The first trace we have of the gospel in Asia Minor is the story of Paul's first coming to Ephesus and there finding twelve men who had been baptized unto John's baptism, and yet had not even heard of the Holy Ghost. Nothing more is told us about these twelve disciples. Who they were, whence they came, why they were in Ephesus, and that apparently as a united band, we are not informed. It is more than probable that they had been on the Jordan before the public ministry of Christ, had listened to the preaching of John, had been followers of him and been baptized by him, but then had been rudely separated, had known little if any of the preaching of Christ, perhaps had heard little about his death, certainly nothing of the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost, and had drifted into Ephesus.

The next rays of light we find shining on the land of the seven churches are in connection with the descent of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost. Among the multitudes assembled on that memorable occasion were men from Cappadocia, Pontus, Phrygia and Pamphylia, and others of the regions lying between and around these apocalyptic cities. These strangers from those distant lands must have heard the wonders of the gospel on that day, some of them must have been among its blessed converts, and when they returned home they must have related to their wondering neighbors the story of what they had seen and heard and felt. On the porticoes of Diana's temple in Ephesus, on the quays of Smyrna, in the groves of Pergamos, and in the wool-markets of Laodicea the story of Christ and his Spirit and his most glorious salvation would be rehearsed to gaping crowds. And many would believe, and many true converts would be added to the people of God, and thus the gospel would take deep and permanent root.

Another trace of the truth in that land in those early days we have in connection with the first introduction of Christianity into Europe. Paul and Silas had come with the gospel message into

Philippi, the first city of Europe where it was ever heard. There probably being no synagogue in the place, on the Sabbath they went out of the city by the side of a little stream of water where a number of devout women had assembled for prayer. Among these was one named Lydia, who had come from Thyatira, one of the seven cities, bringing with her the purple dyes of that region, of which she was a seller. She listened to the story of the Cross as it fell from the lips of the earnest apostle. The Lord carried it to her heart and fixed it there. She was truly converted. She gave herself, her property, and her family to the service of her new Lord. Would not such a woman become a loving missionary of the new religion? When she returned home, would she ever tire of telling the tidings of the salvation and the heavenly rest which the Son of God had come down from glory to offer to the weary and the lost? Undoubtedly some would believe her. They could not but believe her loving and earnest words. How the wondrous story would be rehearsed in the shops of the purple-manufactories, through the fields where the staple grew, and on the banks of the Hermus, where many a little praying group would assemble! And the amazing story would be carried on over the great road leading to Sardis, over the plains which the river washed, and up the declivities of Mount Tmolus and other ridges.

No doubt there were many other preliminary movements in connection with the establishment of Christianity in that region of Asia, of whose history nothing has come down to us, but which had a vast influence in that formative period. Certain it is that Apollos, the eloquent Jew from Alexandria, had deeply studied the mysteries of the way of the Lord. He had learned the great things of the kingdom in the home of Aquila and Priscilla, and then with fervent words he had pressed them on the hearts and consciences of all who would listen. That devoted couple also, even while engaged in the daily drudgery of their tent-making trade, would make their influence felt in spreading around them the news of the great salvation.

All these were important steps in the way of the great preparation for setting up the divine kingdom in those cities. They were not insignificant as precursory movements. Regarded in one view, they were of vast importance. Here were twelve disciples at Ephesus who had passed through the baptism of John; here converts from the great pentecostal scenes spreading the news from city to city; here Lydia and her friends and relatives moving backward

and forward with offers of grace; here the eloquent tongue of Apollos pleading in many a synagogue; and here the friendly door of Aquila and Priscilla open to all who might come to inquire about the way of life.

### 5. SPECIAL WORK IN THE SEVERAL CITIES.

As it is with the missionary work at the present day, doubtless the gospel met with many a stirring adventure in those early times when it was a stranger among the children of men. Many an obstacle it would encounter, many a misunderstanding would hinder, and many an enemy would oppose. But it went steadily on, increasing in strength and vigor. Here and there we obtain glimpses of its earliest growth in almost all of the seven churches.

*Ephesus* was selected as the field of the first great encounter because it was nearest to the stirring scenes of the world's active progress, and because whatever influences might prevail there would soon extend to other adjoining cities. The ships which arrived in its port would bring with them "the glad tidings of good things," and then the Roman roads running up into the interior would forward those tidings into every town and village of the land. Ephesus was first chosen because it was "the centre of intercourse and traffic for a large part of Asia, and the most considerable place of commerce on this side of the Taurus. The spirit of the times, dissatisfied with all the existing religions and eager after something new, was favorable to all changes." In that city the people were energetic, the currents of life were strong and restless, and the great roads radiating out from it through the interior gave it facilities for disseminating the news of salvation which were possessed by no other place of that day.

In *Smyrna* also there were similar facilities for extending the triumphs of the Cross. Its location on the beautiful coast of the Ægean, which connected it with the greatest activities of the age; the character of the city, which it still bears, as a great commercial centre; and the fact that multitudes of Jews had been attracted thither,—all would conspire to make it one of the early strongholds of the gospel. Certain it is that the church of Smyrna soon became one of the most devoted and faithful of all. Not one of the seven had a better record.

As to the planting of the church in *Pergamos* we have no record. It must have called forth much zeal and strong efforts, for the obstacles in its way were great. The intense idolatry of the place must have raised a formidable barrier in the way of the truth.

Only in the Book of God is the record to be found of the sufferings that were endured and the toils that were passed through by those faithful men and women who, amid the scorn of the great, the learning of the scholars, and the superstition of the multitudes, denied themselves, persevered steadily forward, and trusted God amid every discouragement, until even on earth they received the title to the white stone with the new name.

We have already seen how the gospel may at first have been carried to *Thyatira* through Lydia, a seller of purple. We have seen her at Philippi when Paul and Silas began to preach the gospel in Europe. We know that the Lord touched her heart, and that she and her household were baptized. As a consequence of the intercourse which would be likely to follow between that family and their friends in Thyatira, it is probable that the church was established in that city. "She who had gone forth for a while to buy and sell and get gain, when she returned home may have brought with her richer merchandise than any she had looked to obtain."

Concerning the introduction of Christianity into *Sardis* we know less than of its introduction into any other of the seven cities except Philadelphia. Indeed, we have no positive information whatever. There is a single hint which intimates that the people of Sardis had at first received the truth with great ardor. In the message to it we find the words, "Remember, therefore, how thou hast received, and heard; and hold fast, and repent." From this it seems probable that their first love was intense, and that the church had given promise of much zeal and usefulness and fidelity. We can easily imagine that in such a place, so proud, so worldly, so gay, it would require more than an ordinary degree of devotion to enable the people of God to walk worthy of their vocation.

*Philadelphia* is the church next in order. Concerning its early history we know nothing. As has been truthfully said, "Unlike its sister churches, there is no halo of mythic antiquity about its origin; no olden stories of nymphs or heroes cradled on its site invested it with sanctity or wove a localized superstition into its civic celebrations." This church is remarkably destitute of early traditions of any kind. It seems to have been small and poor and almost overlooked by the great tides of religious influences which swept around it. But it had a good record before God, who sees not as man sees.

Several things conspired to make the church of *Laodicea* very important and to give great interest to its earliest history. The

location of the city among the head-waters of the Meander, one of the chief rivers of the country, and on the great road leading from the coast into the interior, gave it much prominence and advantage. So, too, its wealth added to its influence. This wealth arose from its location on the great line of travel up the valley of the Meander, from its trade in wool brought in from the surrounding country, from its commerce in dyes, and especially from the valuable timbers brought in such abundance to its market out of the adjacent forests. This commerce and wealth attracted to the city a large Jewish population, to which the gospel would naturally be carried at first. From this large Jewish element in the population, from the throngs of travelers constantly passing through the place, from the fact that Paul's first missionary tours took him either immediately into the city or to its surrounding towns and villages, and from the activity which its busy commerce would necessarily awaken,—from all these causes it would naturally follow that the religion of Christ would very early gain a foothold in Laodicea. And such was the fact. The church of that city soon became one of the most influential of those established in Asia Minor. Probably, next to Ephesus, it was the strongest of them all.

This eminence the Laodicean church retained long afterward, for it became the seat of prominent officers of the Christian body and the place of holding great councils where important theological questions were settled. Moreover, the early conflict of Christianity with heathenism must have raged fiercely in that city. At the very time when the great champions of the truth were there its enemies were putting forth gigantic efforts. While the voice of Paul or other heroes of the truth was ringing through the streets there might also have been heard the hammering of the workmen as they reared one of the most magnificent heathen amphitheatres which that land ever beheld, and the erection of which required ten long years. The very men who planted the church of Laodicea could see day by day the building of that structure whose splendid ruins are at the present time exciting the wonder of the traveler.

### 6. PAUL'S GREATEST WORK.

A more eventful missionary enterprise there never was than that of Paul and his friends in that historic region. No other portion of this apostle's history was so effective as that in which he took the lead in planting and establishing the seven churches.

In the progress of his laborious and self-sacrificing toils Paul had passed through the highlands in the interior of the country, descended from the mountains, most probably had traveled down the vale of the Meander, crossed the "Asian meadows," and reached Ephesus, the great rendezvous of adventurers, magicians, necromancers, empirics of every kind, outlandish idolaters, fugitive criminals, speculators in religion and politics, priests, sceptics, money-makers, spendthrifts, Romans from Italy, Gauls from the mountains, Greeks from Achaia and the Ægean Islands, strange beings from the mystic regions of the Ganges and the Indus, Jews from the sacred city, merchants from Egypt and Cyprus, seamen from a thousand ports, soldiers from many a battle-field, and characters good and bad from every land and condition of mankind. It was as if Providence had brought them there in order that they might receive the permanent influences of the gospel, just as the thousands were drawn to Jerusalem to behold and receive the blessings of the Holy Ghost on the day of Pentecost.

They were days to be remembered for evermore which the great apostle spent amid that motley assembly of human beings, in the synagogues of the Jews, in the schools of philosophers and rhetoricians, in streets crowded with many a nationality, on busy wharves where the confusion of vessels arriving and departing bewildered, in markets and public squares where hundreds of idlers loitered, in the precincts of the famous temple that swarmed with men of every character, and in every spot where he could find listeners to his story of the Cross. But among that multitude there were some earnest souls who had been attracted to the schools and synagogues of the great city. Among these the apostle, constantly on the outlook for the interests of the Master's cause, discovered twelve men who were in the anomalous condition of having been baptized by John the Baptist, and yet were ignorant of the vital truths concerning the Holy Ghost. Guided by inspired wisdom, he instructed them, led them to a fuller experience, put his hands upon them, indicative of the Spirit's blessings which he was empowered to bestow, and then had the seal set to his ministry by their being indued with the power of speaking with tongues and prophesying.

We are now able to follow him closely as he pursued the Master's work. For three months we find him a constant attendant in the synagogue, boldly declaring and defending the truth as it is in Christ Jesus, and urging men to turn from their sins and their idols and to find peace in the crucified and risen Saviour.

As usual, however, most of the Jews became only the more hardened, and reviled the holy name of the Son of God. Hence the apostle soon saw that it would be vain to continue his labors amid such bitter opponents, and determined to leave the prejudiced Jews and turn to the Gentiles. Accordingly, after three months' constant labors he left the synagogue, which was open to him only three times in the week, and secured the hall of a certain rhetorician or philosopher called Tyrannus, in which he could proclaim the truth from day to day. That hall became a sacred spot, for in it, for the space of two years, the tidings of Christ and his salvation were proclaimed to multitudes who had never heard them before, and by whom they were doubtless carried far and near through the world.

Meantime, other missionary operations were diligently pursued by the apostle and his friends. Many an excursion we have reason to believe they made over the great roads which radiated from Ephesus throughout the whole land. It is probable that the inhabitants of all the great cities received the truth from the inspired lips of Paul.

The crisis was a momentous one, and extraordinary efforts and results were called forth. The gospel was brought into contact with magic and the practice of curious arts, with soothsayers, necromancers, practicers of legerdemain, and tricksters of every kind, and it became necessary to defeat them all on their own soil. As a modern writer has presented the matter: "It was a common thing in Ephesus to use all kinds of magic remedies and curious arts. We are not, therefore, surprised to hear that articles of dress which had belonged to Paul, handkerchiefs which he had used, and aprons with which he had been girded in the pursuit of his trade were assumed by the Ephesians to have caught a magic efficacy and were carried about to sick people and demoniacs. . . . Since Ephesus was the headquarters of diabolism and sorcery and witchcraft, the use of the handkerchiefs and aprons, whether authorized by him or not, was so far overruled to beneficial results of healing as to prove the superiority of the Christian faith in the acropolis of paganism and to prepare the way for holy worship in the stronghold of Eastern fanaticism and Grecian vice." Such uncommon results were needed to meet the peculiar state of religion and morals and to gain the required attention to the power of that Christ whom Paul preached. There is no doubt but the cures were of a truth miraculous, for we read, "So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs and aprons, and the

diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them." It must be remembered that this was in the midst of a people wedded to tricks of magic and the practice of the black art. It would thus be seen that there was a real, miraculous power before which all their impostures would fail. Hardly anything else would have reached such a people.

Encouraged by seeing the marvelous power exercised by the apostle, impostors endeavored to exert the same by their tricks. There was a certain renegade Jewish priest called Sceva, with seven sons, who was a leader in the imposture with which the whole air was filled. These vagabonds impudently professed that they had miraculous power by which they could cast out devils and heal diseases. They were suffered to go on and to bring down confusion on their own heads. In one case they tried their assumed power by calling over a man who was possessed with evil spirits the foolish and, in their mouths, impious words, "We adjure you in the name of the Lord Jesus whom Paul preacheth." This was the limit of their effrontery which it would not do to tolerate. A shameful climax must follow. The possessed man was moved to reply in the most scornful manner, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are ye?" Then he leaped on them with the fury of a madman, crushed them to the earth, tore their clothes into shreds, and drove them out of the house naked, bleeding, and in shame.

That was an argument which such a motley crew could understand. The news spread fast and far. It humbled them. It showed the infinite superiority and dignity of the religion of Christ. In consequence, multitudes were drawn to the teachings of Paul, and through them to the Cross of salvation.

Among the rest there were certain persons who professed to have been converted, and in reality were very deeply impressed, but who still clung to their old arts of magic. At this strange and startling event, however, they were convinced that they must make a full sacrifice. This they now did, and in a way that was distinct and impressive. In the practice of their magic arts they had used mystic volumes which were rare and costly. Now these books must go. There must be no half-way work. Accordingly, they brought all those books which they had treasured up so carefully, and which had been to them such a source of gain, and threw them into the flames. So great an act of sacrifice was this esteemed, and so clear an indication did it afford of a radical change in those who made it, that the value of the destroyed books is given. It was

no less than seven thousand five hundred dollars—at that time a vast sum.

For the space of two years Paul taught day by day in the hall of the rhetorician, visited from house to house, wrote letters to the churches, wrought miracles in the name of Christ, toiled incessantly, and saw God's work prospering in that great city. And then an event occurred which produced intense excitement and was most significant as an indication of the progress of the gospel in that metropolis of Asia Minor. There had grown up a vast trade in Ephesus in the manufacturing and selling of gold and silver statuettes of its tutelary deity, Diana, and of her temple. The manufacture of these shrines was a very lucrative business, as they were in great request; they were set up in houses as objects of worship, or carried about the person as having the supposed power to avert diseases or other dangers. They were not only sold in Asia Minor, but sent as an article of traffic to distant countries. And not only so, but the thousands of pilgrims who came from all lands to worship at the temple, and the thousands more who came to admire that splendid wonder of the world, would desire to carry home with them the statuettes, either as mementoes of their journey or as objects of worship.

However, just as the gospel advanced the trade in these shrines diminished. The manufacturers began to feel this in the decline of their business. There soon arose an outcry that the trade in these sacred things was in danger of destruction. The whole blame was heaped upon Paul and those associated with him in his holy work. This told in a most significant way that the gospel was advancing rapidly and in a substantial manner. The excitement increased. The feeling of dislike to the gospel and of dread at the loss of a profitable trade became more and more outspoken. It could not be suppressed. A certain silversmith, Demetrius by name, became the leader in a formidable outbreak of popular feeling. Into some public place he managed to collect a mob of his fellow-workmen, and addressed them in a most inflammatory manner. He appealed to their national pride as residents of the great metropolitan city of Asia, and to their devotional feelings as worshipers of Diana, the goddess who had come down from heaven to dwell among them, and he pointed out the ruin which was steadily coming upon their business from the contempt into which the preaching of Paul was bringing the silver images which were the source of their living and wealth. His speech had the intended effect. The unreasoning crowd was ex-

cited into intense wrath. In their blind fury they shouted out continuously, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" The excitement grew greater and greater, wilder and fiercer, until the whole city became full of confusion. Finally the mob laid hold upon the first victims that came to their hands, and, dragging with them Gaius and Aristarchus, simply because they were Macedonians and traveling companions of Paul, they rushed into the great theatre. Paul was held back from presenting himself before the infuriated populace by his friends, because they were well aware that he would have been torn to pieces.

And now the rabble, wild as the lawless sea, raved and stormed in the immense building, some crying out one thing and some another, the great majority, however, being ignorant of the cause of the commotion. The scene grew wilder and wilder as the whole mob for two hours continued to cry out, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians."

At length, with singular tact and calmness, the chief officer of the city succeeded in gaining the attention of the mob and in quieting their wrathful excitement. He appealed to the fact that all acknowledged Diana as the tutelary deity of Ephesus, to the prudence and wisdom of their being calm, to the custom, so well known, of referring all such questions to the established courts of law, to the evidence that Paul and his associates were no robbers of temples or blasphemers of their deity, and to the danger they were incurring of being called in question for such tumultuous proceedings by the Roman government.

The danger was in this way averted, the tumult subdued, and the mob dispersed. But Paul learned from the events of that day that his personal safety required that he should withdraw from that field of gospel labor. The Lord had made express provision for such an emergency in the word contained in his first missionary charge to the apostles: "When they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another." Following this instruction, Paul determined to leave Ephesus. His work in that city was done, the gospel had been preached so that every one could hear it, Christianity had become fully established, and the great apostle of the Gentiles could find another field, in which, in the future, he could labor more efficiently than there.

Such were the leading events connected with the apostle's work in the chief of the seven apocalyptic cities. The results were stupendous. Out of that work it came to pass that in that city there

arose a splendid practical demonstration that the gospel was designed for the Gentile as well as for the Jewish world; that blows the most tremendous were struck against the walls of idolatry; that the foundations of the most renowned pagan worship were loosened; that changes the most radical and important were introduced and firmly established; and that there was brought into the kingdom of our Lord a great body of believers who must have had the richest and the ripest experience, since they were prepared to receive messages so profound and spiritual as those which are found in the "Epistle to the Ephesians."

### 7. JOHN'S CONNECTION WITH THE WORK.

The church of Asia Minor was thus planted chiefly by the wisdom and self-sacrificing toils of Paul, the chief of the apostles, but to nurture it required a skill and an industry that were equally great. All was crude and untried, and hence great care was needed in order to carry on the work with success. As is always the case when the necessity arises, God had a man ready for the work. The beloved disciple John was the man whom God in his wisdom and providence sent to the land of the seven churches to confirm the initiatory work of Paul and to establish the cause in that country which would send out its influences over all other countries. Paul planted, but in this case John watered. The same general plan of divine working has many times over been witnessed throughout the history of the Church. It was so in the times of the Reformation. Then it was the work of Luther to break through every obstacle and lay the foundations of the structure of God's revivified Church; it was the work of Calvin to build on those foundations and arrange the splendid edifice and perfect it for the glorious destiny unto which it was appointed.

The mission of the beloved disciple was chiefly in the favored land of proconsular Asia. There the greater part of his apostolic life was passed. It is certain that after the crucifixion of Christ he remained for a time in Jerusalem, taking care of the mother of our Lord who had been committed to his charge by the dying lips of his Master, while he assisted in guiding the interests of the infant Church. But the career of that city drew toward its dreadful close, and the people of God must flee elsewhere.

John's steps were directed to Ephesus, where God had a wider field and a grander work prepared for him. In the cities of Asia Minor he lived and testified of Christ. There he wrought miracles, endured persecutions, organized Christian societies, taught the way

of life, gathered souls into the kingdom, reproved error, watched over the infant branches of the kingdom, and impressed his own Christ-taught character upon the cause of the gospel for thirty or forty years. No mortal ever had a more honorable mission. No man ever left a deeper, brighter, more glorious impress upon the ages and nations than did John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, during the closing years of his apostleship, chiefly in the city of Ephesus. No wonder that even to this day his memorial is fixed upon the ruins of that city where he lived, preached, died, and was buried, for even to the present hour its desolate ruins bear the name of "Ayasaluk"—"the holy theologian."

### 8. GLIMPSES OF TIMOTHY'S WORK.

It would seem that the very wisest and best of the gospel workmen were used in establishing these first churches which arose on Gentile soil and were designed to serve as a pattern for all other churches that were to follow. The adorable Head of the kingdom seems to have chosen his choicest instruments for a work so vast in itself and so momentous in its results. We have already seen that the faithful Priscilla and Aquila were sent to toil in that field; that there the eloquent Apollos exerted his mightiest efforts; that Paul, the greatest of the apostles, made it the chief field of his labors; that John, the dearly-beloved friend of our Lord, spent the better part of his life in the grand enterprise; and we are now to add that Timothy, the favorite spiritual child of Paul, put forth his strength on this work upon which so much was dependent. How long or exactly when this eminent servant of Christ labored in Ephesus we do not know. All that we have are mere glimpses of his work.

That he was in Ephesus we know, and that he held an important position there we are also positive, for Paul writes to him: "I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine." Indeed, everything seems to confirm the tradition that Timothy spent the latter part of his life in Ephesus, striving to confirm the work already done, to check the downward progress of error and corruption, and to help forward the glorious cause in that metropolitan city. There he lived, there he toiled, there he suffered, and there, in all probability, he died the death of a martyr, a few years after Paul had glorified God in the same way at Rome. What gives Timothy's work at Ephesus its great importance is the conviction that such a man, the favorite pupil of Paul, the Spirit-

taught minister of the Church in her most eventful days, the honored man whose name is connected with two of the books in the inspired volume, would not have been appointed by the great Head of the Church to a work that was not of the very first importance. The aid of Timothy was used in the first great conflict of the gospel with paganism in establishing the seven churches; this is in itself a volume of important information.

### 9. RAPIDITY OF THE CHURCH'S GROWTH.

It is impossible to study with care the rapidity of the Church's growth in this Asiatic land without being convinced that there was in it a lesson designed for instruction throughout all after-times. It had an immediate and direct purpose, but it also had this ulterior one: this first and most successful contact of the gospel with the pagan world was a lesson, never to be forgotten, of what it might always do. In this respect it was a grand element of the beacon for which the whole event and the record of it were designed.

It is remarkable how very rapidly the gospel progressed in those sixty-three years. We would have expected that, considering the great ignorance of divine things which universally prevailed, the depravity which had become so deep and hard, the personal interests which were linked in with pagan worship, as well as the natural and universal hostility of men to the truth, Christianity would have been very slow in making its way in that heathen population. Instead of that, however, its advance in a little over half a century was marvelous. The wisdom and the power and the boundless resources of the God of the gospel were manifested in this. In giving to his gospel such exemplary success at that time we see what divine energies were put forth, for in it we find the Holy Spirit which is still granted to the Church with supernatural power; the marvels of God's providence to which either then or now there are not any limits; the boundless resources contained in the claim, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth;" the despised Jews with their lingering knowledge of the true God and his word; the enterprise and civilization of a people gathered from the most cultivated nations of the world; the weariness of men with all the objects of worship which were then in existence; the widespread cravings of thousands of souls for a rest which nothing upon earth had yet afforded; the fresh earnestness of the greatest of the apostles; yea, even the very wrath of man which God so often makes to praise him; all these, united, intensified, and guided by a divine

hand, brought about this rapid and blessed change at which the world might well stand aghast with amazement.

The progress of the gospel during its first few years in that region of pagan darkness can be appreciated by us only when we compare it with the present, and when we take that sudden change and estimate it in the light of some similar changes in our own day. The advance which we behold Christianity making at the present time has been the result of the work of centuries; the state of these seven churches was the result of only a little more than half a century of gospel toil. Estimate the shortness of the time, and then look at the many things which indicate the wondrous progress of the cause therein. Sixty-three years! and in that short space the stupendous system of heathen worship was shaken to its very foundations; the churches of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea, Colosse, Hierapolis, Miletus, and no doubt many others, were firmly established; the broad and deep foundations were laid of churches which have been looked back upon as patterns through all the centuries; churches were founded so important that these special messages were sent to them from the heavenly throne—churches so prominent in the movements of the divine kingdom that their departures from truth and righteousness were made a perpetual warning for all the succeeding ages —churches that have modified the currents of human destiny—churches whose influence was to be so momentous that the providence of God in a special manner directed all the steps of their history, and the Son of God addressed to them these messages of surpassing importance.

In order to appreciate the magnitude of this first great movement of Christianity among the Gentile nations, we have but to study what it found Asia Minor, and then what it made that country in a space of time which was but a little over half a century. In the beginning of that period it found it a land of wellnigh unbroken paganism; at the close it had become the home of these seven churches. At the beginning it was a region dark as the shadow of death; at the close it was a centre of the brightest light, sending out its beams through every region of the civilized world. At the beginning it was famed chiefly for its pagan wonders of the world and for its perishable monuments; at its close it was renowned as the seat of the seven golden candlesticks with their celestial glory. At the beginning it was celebrated as the theatre of the wisdom and the mighty deeds of a Homer, a Crœsus, and an Alexander the Great; at its

close it was known as the land which had witnessed the toils and the sufferings and the triumphs of Christ-taught Timothy and John and Paul. At the beginning it could boast of its splendid cities, its magnificent architecture, its great schools of philosophy, and its shrines and its idols; at its close it rejoiced in its churches made without hands, in its names registered in the book of life, and in its streams of gracious influence that would spread afar throughout all the families of the world. It is probable that never, in the same length of time, in one land, did the gospel make such rapid and solid progress as it did then and in that land. As was well said by a brilliant preacher, Griffin: "In the wonderful campaign Christ went forth single-handed against two worlds. He girded his sword upon his thigh and marched directly into the heart of Satan's kingdom. Wherever he went he conquered. At his approach temples and altars fell and oracles grew dumb; the Roman empire, the chief seat of Satan's visible empire, shook to its centre and afterward fell prostrate at his feet. He marched through the lands, breaking down the prisons which Satan had reared to confine his wretched captives. Millions who had been immured in dungeons were brought forth to the joyous light. Wherever he came, freedom and joy sprung up around him." In all this we may see most clearly what the truth as it is in Christ Jesus, when used by the power of the Holy Ghost, is capable of accomplishing. Oh, had the Church only been faithful to her trust, the world had been converted long ago!

### 10. STRENGTH OF THE CHURCHES IN NUMBERS.

How large were these seven churches?—how strong in numbers? We have no definite answer to this question on record, but we can gather up several facts and inferences which will aid us in making an estimate.

From the fact that Demetrius and other silver-workers of Ephesus were so much alarmed at the decrease of their trade we can see that the Christians had become a large element in the population of that city. If they had been a mere handful, those who assaulted them would not have been so much excited. That the business of the shrine-makers was falling off and in danger of being ruined furnishes clear evidence that the Church of Christ was extending rapidly among the masses. That Diana—whose temple was one of the wonders of the world, and which attracted worshipers from all Asia—was made to tremble upon her throne tells of the uprising of a formidable adversary. Still further,

we can form some estimate of the strength of these churches from the fact that the ascended King committed to their trust these apocalyptic messages which were designed for the whole Church of God through all time. We may also form an instructive estimate from the gathering at Miletus of the Ephesians to meet Paul on his way to Jerusalem. The facts that the inspired apostle felt impelled to summon such an assemblage; that the whole gathering consisted of elders; that these elders were all from the one city of Ephesus; that Paul was led to deliver such a profound address; and that in that address there were several allusions and counsels indicative of a strong body of believers, —all these things make it plain that there must have been a very large number of Christians in Ephesus, which was only one of the seven.

Still other evidence of the strength of these churches we have from a pagan writer. Pliny, governor of Pontus and Bithynia, in a letter to the emperor Trajan, written a few years after the penning of the Apocalypse, requested instruction as to the manner in which he should deal with those accused of being Christians. Christians, he writes, there were everywhere—throughout the whole extent of the provinces, in cities, in villages, and in the open country. Among them were persons of all ages, of every rank and condition, and of both sexes; and some of them also were citizens of Rome. The prevalence of Christianity appears likewise from the universal decay of pagan worship. The temples were deserted and the sacrifices discontinued. Beasts brought to market as victims had few purchasers. So many were accused, and were in danger of suffering on account of the prevalence of the new religion, that the governor of the country was much concerned. Still other facts might be adduced to show that a large portion of the population had been led to the acceptance of Christianity.

### 11. STRENGTH IN RELIGIOUS CHARACTER.

The degree of knowledge and depth of piety in these churches were also remarkable, considering that they had not been matured by ages of growth, as our churches have been. We have evidences of this on every side. The people who could appreciate or even comprehend such writing as the Epistle to the Ephesians must have made high attainments in grace. It is very significant indeed that the Epistles to the Ephesians, to the Colossians, and to the Galatians—so exalted and so profound—were first sent to

churches of Asia Minor. It may well be questioned whether, even in the present day, there are Christians of riper experience than were those of the seven churches to whom the enthroned King addressed his inaugural messages.

Many other things gave evidence of the depth of the piety of these early believers of the first churches. It was seen in the sacrifices they made for their Lord. Would we, at the present day, be ready to endure such sufferings from the hands of persecutors as they experienced? Is there with us a strength of principle, a willingness to give up self, an intensity of purpose that would sustain us in struggling against such inveterate habits of vice and idolatry as they subdued? Such considerations make it manifest that their faith was sound and that the Christian character resulting therefrom was substantial.

# CHAPTER III.

## MESSAGES FROM HEAVEN.

### 1. CAREFUL STUDY REQUIRED.

As the student of nature must search for the phenomena of nature and classify them in order that he may discover the laws which the Creator has impressed on the works of his hands, so must the student of Scripture search for the teachings of the Sacred Book and arrange them in order that he may understand the principles according to which the same Supreme Being governs his spiritual kingdom. The manifestations of his wisdom, power, and goodness in the two realms must be similar. The way of studying them must be substantially the same, even though there are some points wherein the spiritual must soar immeasurably above what is usually denominated science.

The author of the Bible and of nature being one and the same, it is to be expected that these works would have similar characteristics. Hence we are not surprised at finding that the phenomena of the one and the facts or teachings of the other are not generally arranged in scientific order, but are widely scattered in various connections. The phenomena of matter and mind are scattered throughout all the provinces of creation, and the facts of the Bible are to be found in all parts of the Sacred Book. The student of the material and spiritual works of God carefully inquires and experiments until he reaches the phenomena, and then he is delighted to find that they all fall into a beautiful system, where everything has a place and tends to some definite end. Everything is guided by law. The whole system is full of order and beauty and use. The ultimate tendency of all is to manifest the glory of God. This is the grand discovery of science. But there must be profound and long-continued study in order to reach the result.

Precisely thus must it be with the student of the Bible if he would reach any good degree of satisfaction in his sacred pursuit. Except the vital and fundamental facts of religion, which lie on the surface, and must be known if anything whatever is known of that exalting subject, all the treasures of the Bible must be

reached through well-planned and profound study. The divine laws of the Bible must be ascertained through investigations in detail of the facts or teachings which are contained in the chapters, verses, or clauses of the book. But when these are reached with even a tolerable degree of certainty, then will be seen the perfection of the Bible as the revelation of God's will, in which everything is in its most fitting place and contributes in the best manner to the one end—even that of setting forth Christ and him crucified. This is at once the foundation, the centre, and the top-stone of all our investigations. There is no more lofty study than that of discovering and classifying the facts, the laws, and the principles of God's word.

Upon this field of research would we now enter. Through this it is that we may be made wise unto salvation. By this the soul may become more and more meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. By it the great springs must be set in motion that will eventuate in bringing our whole world to Christ. The word of God rightly understood and applied is the appointed instrumentality through which the divine decree is yet to be fulfilled that the Son of God shall have the heathen for his inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession. Through the word applied to the soul it is yet to come to pass "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

### 2. THE MESSAGES ARE UNIQUE PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE.

The passage of Scripture which contains the special messages from heaven to the seven churches of Asia differs in almost every respect from all other portions of the Sacred Book. It is manifestly unique when compared with any other book that was ever penned. There are several well-defined elements of this singularity which ought to receive our careful attention:

(1) There is mystery in the messages both in their matter and form—a mystery that was not unintentional. The divine Author clothed them in mystery for some good purpose, as we learn from his own words: "The *mystery* of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks."

(2) Another peculiarity, immediately connected with the foregoing, is the great difficulty there obviously is in getting down to the true meaning of much that is in these two chapters. In

many cases it is not possible to do this without much patient thought and research. This is evident from the many interpretations which much of it has received.

(3) The brevity of this passage is singular. It evidently holds a prominent place in the plan of revelation, and yet it is contained in the short space of two chapters. In that concise portion of the word we have seven important messages to as many churches. These cover all the vital points of Christian life and godliness; they portray the various attributes of the divine Being; they contain rebukes, commendations, counsels, threatenings, promises, exhortations, and thus reach almost every feature of the believer's experience. Why are they so comprehensive? Why are they given with so much brevity? Why do they lay down principles only? This is a remarkable characteristic of the messages. It is significant, and must have a wise object in view.

(4) Who can tell exactly the meaning of the peculiar location of this portion of God's revealed will? It seems vitally connected with the divine unfolding of the whole destiny of the Church and the world, and yet has no part in it. It is inserted as an element of the most sublime of books in the Bible, and that where every word is freighted with meaning as the whole volume hastens to a close, and yet it seems to be utterly isolated. Who shall explain this?

(5) The messages were addressed to the old churches of Asia Minor. About eighteen centuries have passed away; the churches have almost died out from the memory of men, and nothing but ruins remain to mark the spot where most of them stood; and yet those messages pertained to the living questions of this very day, and were intended for us also, as well as for the generations yet to come. They are even pressed home upon us with a special promise upon their careful study. What means this?

(6) How strange that these messages, so old and yet so new, so isolated in their position and yet so vitally connected with every other portion of the Sacred Book, should be revealed in a way so different from all the rest! In order to impress them upon the people for whom they were intended, the aged disciple-friend of our Lord is sent a prisoner to a solitary island in the Ægean Sea. He is absorbed in the devotion of the Lord's day. The revealing Spirit wraps him in vision; the heavens are opened to his view; celestial scenes pass before his gaze; the voice of the glorified Son of man is heard; a charge is given to him to write and send the divine commands to seven of the churches

where his late ministry had been spent; and then, after all this preparation, these messages are dictated to him. Did writing ever have such a distinguished origin as this?

(7) Why were these messages addressed especially to those seven churches? Why not to the older and more notable church of Jerusalem? Why not to the church of Antioch, where Christianity first received that name? Why not to the church of Rome, which from its location had boundless influence upon the world? Why to any particular churches, and not to the people of God in general?

Put all these peculiarities of the messages together; think of them as intentionally mysterious in matter and in form—as dark and difficult to explore in their full meaning—as brief almost beyond comprehension—as vitally connected with, and yet isolated from, the rest of the inspired pages—as directly addressed to those seven churches while intended for the living issues of every age—as revealed in a manner so unlike every other portion of the Bible—and addressed, as if exclusively, to seven particular congregations of God's people;—when we reflect on these as well as on other extraordinary features of these messages, we cannot but receive the impression that this very singularity was divinely designed, and that for a very important end. Regarding them in what light we may, through the strange emphasis which is laid on them we are admonished in the beginning to look for something of vast importance.

### 3. GREAT NUMBER OF BOOKS WRITTEN ON THE MESSAGES.

It is not to be wondered at that this passage of Scripture has received most profound study from the people of God. Earnest piety, profound intellect, and busy pens have put forth their best efforts on this portion of Holy Writ. This fact shows how important this portion of the Sacred Book is in the estimation of those who have been the best qualified to judge. It manifests most clearly how the heart of piety is in it. It shows that here is a mine of divine riches which has attracted multitudes of workmen, who have successfully toiled, and yet, after all their toils, it has not been exhausted.

### 4. IMPORTANCE OF THE MESSAGES IN GOD'S ESTEEM.

Whatever may have been the divine purpose in causing these messages to be written, it must have been a very important one,

since two chapters out of the twenty-two which contain the whole revelation of the future are devoted to it. The same thing is seen in the care that was exercised in preparing the cities and churches to be the recipients of the messages. There was certainly a special providence in it that at that time there should have been in those seven cities such churches, well established, strong, and fully organized, as was plainly the case, *since they could be addressed through their angels.* There was certainly a very marked providence in it that, though those seven cities were, for the most part, substantially alike in population and culture, yet they were so diverse in character as to cause such an instructive variety in the effects of the gospel upon them. The cities had distinct characters of their own, even though they were not many miles apart. Ephesus was the city of active, cultivated, sensual idolatry; Smyrna the city of commerce; Pergamos the cathedral and college city, the seat of culture; Thyatira the city of gross sensuality; Sardis the aristocratic city; Philadelphia a city small and despised; Laodicea the rich and purse-proud city. These characteristics were well marked, and they gave a peculiar type to the respective churches. In these seven cities there were seven distinct types of religion, and these such as to embrace every variety. Unquestionably, the heart and hand of God were in this—a providential meaning, and an indication of the interest attached to the messages in the divine mind, which we cannot notice without being very deeply impressed.

The esteem in which our Lord held these messages may also be seen in the extraordinary way in which they were made known. They were communicated, in a special manner, through the aged John, the disciple whom Jesus loved. They would not have come to us so lovingly and so solemnly had they come through any other. It would seem that our Lord kept alive this servant whom he loved so well, long after all his brother disciples and friends had gone home, in order that his name and influence might gain for his Master's words a more ready acceptance among the faithful. Through the beloved disciple who had leaned upon his bosom at the supper would he make the revelation upon which his heart was set. He takes that aged friend of his earthly days to the lonely island of Patmos, that there he might commune with him concerning the events that were awaiting his Church. As often in the bygone days he had gone up with him to some solitary mountain-top, and there, beneath the stars and the canopy of

heaven, had opened his heart to him about the interests of his kingdom, so now, once more upon earth, would he pour out his soul concerning the most momentous of earthly things to him who was the best beloved of mortals.

The strangeness of the messages itself manifested that they occupied no ordinary place in the regard of the divine Author. They were so singular in form as to import that they were singular in value. Their extraordinary character proved that they had a mission of more than ordinary moment. We cannot but be impressed with this thought when we reflect on the circuitous and singular method adopted in setting them before the world. A direct communication from heaven might have accomplished the purpose, but, instead of that, we see how roundabout and extraordinary was the process. How many singular steps! In keeping the aged evangelist for many years a missionary among the churches of Asia Minor; in sending him a prisoner to the solitary island of the sea; in coming to him by special presence in the meditations of the Lord's day; in opening heaven to his wondering gaze; in speaking to him by celestial voice; in pronouncing the strange words that were to be delivered to the churches; in commanding that these words should be written and sent to the angels of the churches; in dictating a message to each church separately; in filling each message with symbols such as were never presented before;—all this most certainly must have sprung from a deep interest in the mind of the Revealer. This same place in the divine regard is also seen in shaping each message according to the character of the people to whom it is addressed, and in the fact that throughout them all there is no confusion, no tautology, but every emblem and every word is discriminating, definite, full of meaning.

Still further, this special divine interest in the messages is apparent from the impressive words by which they are urged home upon the attention of believers: "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy." How the whole believing world should awake and listen to the charge given to the Spirit-illumined seer: "Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter"! Who can be inattentive when seven times over the obligation is laid upon all: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches"? No other passage of Scripture is pressed home so strongly and repeatedly as this. We cannot conceive how the divine esteem could be more clearly

manifested. Most undoubtedly, in the mind of Christ their place must have been a most exalted one.

### 5. LOCATION OF THE MESSAGES IN THE APOCALYPSE.

One of the many things showing the deep significance of this portion of Scripture is the prominent place it holds in the last book of the Bible. As the Sacred Book draws nearer to the close its words must necessarily grow more emphatic. The words of these messages, then, are the more weighty as they stand at once at the opening of the Apocalypse and near the close of the divine volume. Moreover, they are a sort of preface to the book of Revelation, and as such have a claim to be most carefully weighed. They are an integral part of the Apocalypse, without which that portion of the Bible would be incomplete, if not incomprehensible.

This location of the messages is significant. All its surroundings are indicative of vastly important things. Both what goes before and what follows are filled with unearthly grandeur.

Contemplate the sublime things which precede the messages: First, the salutation of the supreme Jehovah, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost: "Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first-begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth." This is followed by an ascription of thanksgiving to the Saviour for his infinite blessings: "Unto him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." Next there sounds out a proclamation of the great object of the whole celestial scene: "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him; and all the kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him." Then was heard the voice of the glorified Son of man asserting with divine majesty, "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty." After this the enraptured seer described the position to which he was raised: "I, John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice as of a trumpet." Then out of the heights

of glory there issued words which dare be uttered by none but the Omnipotent: "I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia." The prophet then turned to discover whence the voice came, and there burst upon his vision a most transporting view of the church and of the august Son of man in his exaltation: "And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; and in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and his hair were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; and his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. And he had in his right hand seven stars; and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword; and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength." Overpowered by the sight, he fell down as one dead. But he was reassured by the infinite tenderness of the celestial King, who laid his right hand on him and said, "Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death." And then from the midst of the scene of heavenly glory was given him the charge, "Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter." With that there burst out glimpses of the majestic scene as described: "The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches; and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches." All was full of mystery, sublimity, awe, glory.

By such scenes were these messages introduced. So grand were they in the sight of Heaven that with all this majesty were they heralded to the Church. It was as if the very splendors of heaven were summoned so as to call forth the most profound attention to every word that God should speak. Then came the messages to the seven churches as they are contained in the two chapters.

No sooner had the sound of the messages ceased than the prophet looked, and, to his still increasing amazement, he beheld a door opened in heaven through which he could gaze upon its brilliant scenes. We feel that, even guided by his inspired words, we must here approach with holy awe. A celestial voice in trumpet tone calls him up amid the radiant glory, and then the grand events of the future are made to pass before him. Such

sight as mortal eyes never beheld enchained his gaze. The central, the supreme, the great white throne stood before him. Oh, the indescribable majesty of Him who sat upon it! What imagery shall serve to convey even a faint impression of his grandeur? The jasper and the sardine stones are the emblems used. The dazzling diamonds and the flesh-colored carnelian, the most brilliant things that mortals know,—these are used to set forth his deity and humanity. Still more glorious was the sublimity rendered by the grandeur of an encircling rainbow. But how can we picture to ourselves the multitude around the throne? "Round about the throne were four and twenty seats, and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold. . . . And in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four living creatures, full of eyes before and behind. And the first living creature was like a lion, and the second living creature like a calf, and the third living creature had a face as a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle. And the four living creatures had each of them six wings about him, and they were full of eyes within." The awe of the heavenly scene becomes more and more intense, for "out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God." Then gaze upon yon sight such as mortal on earth never beheld: "Before the throne there was a sea of glass clear as crystal." Oh, rapturous cry of celestial glory, that, day and night, never ceases to sound out from the glorious throne: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come!" In response to those unceasing praises of Him that sitteth upon the throne, the ransomed multitude, as they cast their crowns before him, exclaim, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created." Such rapturous sights and sounds of awe, glory, sublimity, earth never witnessed, never imagined, and cannot describe.

Just before these—just after the other manifestations of Jehovah's majesty—between these two most sublime descriptions of heaven and deity and the celestials that have ever been vouchsafed to mortals, came these seven messages to the militant Church of Jesus Christ. This indicates the interest and importance in which they are held by the divine Spirit. Even Scripture itself heralds no other passage with such impressive sublimity.

### 6. TIME WHEN THE MESSAGES WERE WRITTEN.

The date of the communication of these messages to the aged apostle is a question of great importance. It must necessarily have an influence upon the interpretation of some points in the passage. *The testimony of antiquity and the careful researches of modern scholars make it wellnigh certain that the time was about the year ninety-six.*

Irenæus, who was born twenty-one years after that date, or in the year one hundred and fifteen, declares of the revelation that it made its appearance at the close of the reign of the emperor Domitian, which was in the year ninety-six. Clement of Alexandria, who was born one hundred years afterward, "speaks of John's returning from Patmos to Ephesus after the death of the tyrant," meaning Domitian. Dr. John Kitto wrote: "The date of the Apocalypse is about the year ninety-six, when the apostle was exiled to Patmos, in the reign of Domitian." This results from the consent of nearly all the early witnesses, from Irenæus onward, and not less from the internal evidence. The letters to the seven churches imply, evidently, that a new generation had arisen since Paul wrote to the Ephesians and founded the neighboring churches. It is clearly implied also that the Jewish polity had now passed away, and a sentence of divine rejection had been pronounced upon those who are called here "the synagogue of Satan." This authority as to the time of these messages is sufficient. We may take it without much question—though other dates have been named—as about the year *ninety-six.*

Consequently, this communication to the churches was made *sixty-six years* after the death of Christ and the first earnest missionary labors of the apostles. Two generations had passed away, and only a few aged people lingered who remembered to have seen or heard an apostle. Paul had suffered a martyr's death many years before. A few ripe old Christians could still be found who could tell of the first movements of the gospel in Ephesus, in Antioch, in Rome, and in Alexandria. Here and there an aged person might be found who remembered the crucifixion, and the darkness which at the same hour terrified Jerusalem. John, the venerable prophet to whom the revelation was given, was tottering on his staff, an old man of almost one hundred years. Twenty-six years before, Jerusalem had been destroyed amid unparalleled horrors, and the Jews were dispersed over the whole world. The Roman government extended over all the

civilized or even half-civilized nations. The empire, in fact, meant the world, for it would tolerate no nation that would not bow to its authority.

Meanwhile the gospel had been preached and the Church established throughout all the regions where the sway of the Cæsars extended. Churches had been founded in almost every city of much importance. Followers of Christ were to be met with in towns, villages, and country places, far and near. They embraced persons of all ranks, conditions, ages, sexes; Roman citizens, foreigners from most distant climes, slaves, freedmen, masters, senators, nobility, artisans, authors, merchants, royal ladies, chained drudges at the door-posts,—all classes were represented among those who were heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ Jesus. The number of the Christians had become so great that governors of provinces who had been commanded to persecute them to the death were perplexed how to do so without seriously diminishing the population. The more they were persecuted the more their number increased. So deep were the roots which Christianity had put forth, that, manifestly, many churches had already become venerable. Although paganism had been universal a century before, but few people could then be found who had not known something about Christianity all their lives.

On the other hand, heathenism was rapidly declining, as it is in Japan and Hindustan at the present time. The temples of the gods were being deserted. Sacrifices, once so solemn and attended by such multitudes, were becoming less and less frequent. Beasts offered for sale to become victims upon the altars could scarcely find purchasers.

But Domitian had just passed away, and the most bloody persecutions were raging. The jealousy of the priests, who, in the vast changes the gospel was effecting, beheld their honor and their support taken away; the ambition of the emperors, who had had themselves proclaimed divine, and looked upon the worship of Jesus as sedition; the superstition of the people, who beheld the new religion uprooting all that they regarded as sacred and venerable; and the wrath of Satan, which intensified all,—all these united in spreading throughout the empire a persecution so diabolic that it might well terrify every follower of Jesus and make the very world turn pale. It was but twenty-eight years since that monster of monsters, Nero, had ended his accursed life by an accursed death of suicide, and his name was still whispered as a synonym of all that was brutal and bloodthirsty.

Only seventeen years before, Pompeii and Herculaneum were buried beneath the storm of fire which beat upon them from the flaming Vesuvius. The sands of the amphitheatres of Rome, of Verona, of Laodicea, and of many other cities were reeking with the blood of gladiators who were hacked to pieces or their bones crushed by wild beasts for the amusement of a brutalized populace.

Vast commotions were felt all the world over in consequence of the new religion which was uprooting paganism and establishing the doctrines of the Cross. Jerusalem as a city had been swept away. The Jews who had rejected their Messiah were reaping the consequences in being made the very offscourings of the earth. It was at this time and amid this state of things throughout the world that these messages were sent to the churches, at a moment when, in the case of almost the entire number, there was declension to a greater or less degree in the intensity of their zeal. Then it was, so near to the beginning, when these instructions from on high could go out over all the ages of the kingdom —when the world's need of some relief from its evils must have been deeply felt—when, at the beginning of the Church, no other precedents had been established, and when instruction from the unerring wisdom of God was so much needed,—then it was that the truth of Christ came into contact with the minds of men and exhibited its native tendencies and force. Then it was, that, after Jerusalem had been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel came as a special messenger from the God of heaven; then it was, that, after Jerusalem had been destroyed again, John the evangelist came with this most momentous communication from Him who is Lord of the new as well as the old dispensation.

### 7. PLACES OF THEIR WRITING AND DESTINATION.

With good reason the name of Patmos is among the most honored of all the names of places made memorable by the footsteps of Deity. It is an island of inconsiderable size; it is probably about seven miles in each direction, and contains nearly fifty square miles of territory. It is situated among the beautiful islands that stud the Icarian Sea—the far-famed Archipelago, each island of which has a strange fascination even in its name. It lies in a straight line one hundred and sixty miles from Athens and forty miles from the coast of Asia Minor. From the sea it has the appearance of a huge mass of rocks rising hundreds of feet above the water. It is bare, rough, and uninviting. It has

but one town of any importance, which is built upon a high rocky bluff overhanging its only port and looking northward over the lovely waters. The whole population of the island is not more than four thousand. On account of the stern and desolate character of the island the Roman government selected it as a suitable place for the banishment of criminals.

Our special interest in this island arises from its connection with the seven churches. In imagination we ascend one of its rocky headlands on the eastern coast. Far beneath us, the waves are fretting against its jagged face. In the distance amid the haze, stretching north and south, is the dim outline of the coast of far-famed Ionia, and back of that, looming up above the horizon, the old mountains that have looked upon so many events of human history.

And now let imagination, directed by what is made known in either sacred or profane history, carry us over the celebrated regions as they would appear if our vision were sufficiently strong and there were nothing to obstruct our view. Raising our eyes above the islands which intervene, we behold four chief rivers draining the whole country and entering into the Ægean amidst the bays of its winding coast. These rivers are landmarks, the seven cities are built on their banks, and a knowledge of them will aid us in grasping the topography of the country. The most southerly of them is the Meander, winding its crooked way for two hundred miles, washing the "Asian meadows" of Homer, and, one hundred miles from its mouth, the ruins of Laodicea are seen on one of its little branches. Some twenty-five miles north of the Meander the Cayster empties into the sea. Ephesus is at the mouth of this river, which runs but a short distance between the mountains Tmolus and Messogis. Next north of the Cayster is the Hermus, the most important of the four; it is over two hundred miles in length; near to its mouth is Smyrna, and on its little branches up among the mountains lie Thyatira, Sardis, and Philadelphia. Still farther north is the little river Caicus, interesting to us merely because on its banks was located the city of Pergamos.

We are now prepared to let the eye roam over the coast and sweep the far-away eastern mountains. Imagination, it should be remembered, takes the place of actual vision. In the distant south, one hundred and thirty or forty miles away, is the island of Rhodes, around which cluster so many events of classic history. Carrying the eye about forty miles up the coast, we reach the mouth of the Meander. There is the old city of Miletus, where

Paul held his conference with the presbyters of the church of Ephesus. On the coast, about fifty miles further to the north, is debouched, elegant, pagan Ephesus. In those days of old its harbor was a forest of masts, its great temple of Diana gleamed in whiteness under the rays of the western sun. Gazing directly east from Ephesus one hundred miles, over the windings of the Meander, along the declivities of Mount Messogis, across the "Asian meadows," we behold wealthy but heartless Laodicea embosomed in a wide smiling country of fields and orchards. Our eye now turns to the north-west from Laodicea. It sweeps for nearly fifty miles over the tributaries of the Cayster, over the ridges of Mount Tmolus, over a district often shaken by earthquakes, and beholds Philadelphia, now known as Allah-Sher —the city of God. Thence northward we look. The vision passes over mountain-spurs and branches of the Hermus, and, at the distance of thirty miles, on the banks of the Pactolus, once famed for its golden sands, rests upon proud, aristocratic Sardis, a name associated with Crœsus the rich, with Solon the wise, with Cyrus the Conqueror, and with Alexander the Great.

In our survey from our Patmos headland we now come back to the western coast, and from Ephesus set out again. The range is northward for nearly forty miles, along the coasts, over creeks and inlets, around capes, through lands every acre of which is associated with some great events of antiquity, and we gaze upon Smyrna with its crowded wharves and vessels from an hundred ports—Smyrna, the Liverpool of that land and age. Northward through the interior we carry our vision for sixty-five miles, and on the banks of the Caicus, with its high crags, its lofty citadel, its groves, its temples, its colleges, its retreats for health and pleasure, we behold Pergamos, the Oxford of that day, renowned amongst men, but fatally marked by the pen of God as "Satan's seat." Fifty miles to the south-east from Pergamos, and at the distance of one hundred and twenty miles from where we stand, on a branch of the Hermus, rises up before us Thyatira with its fields of poppies, its Tyrian dyes, and its name of infamy.

Such were the cities and such the land to which these messages from heaven were addressed. In each of the cities there were churches which must have grown into considerable importance even at that early day. But why to these seven churches only? There were many other cities here and there throughout the land, and some of them even larger than some of the seven. There were such cities as Tralles, Miletus, Colossæ, Magnesia, Hierapolis, Metrop-

olis—why were no messages to these? Probably these seven were places which John had frequently visited, perhaps had resided in them, and in which he was particularly interested. Then, too, beyond doubt, these were cities which, in the providence of God, furnished every variety of type of religion. But, chiefly, *seven* churches were unquestionably selected, that there might thereby be a complete representation of the whole Church in its full variety and covenant relations.

### 8. THE HOLY THEOLOGIAN.

In certain important aspects no mortal on earth has ever been so highly honored as was John the evangelist. Who, as he, was the intimate friend, the companion, the confidant of the Son of God while here on his mission to the lost children of mankind? Who ever received such a holy trust as he did when our Lord committed to his care that beloved mother through whose heart the sword was piercing, and who would be crushed and in desolation through his death upon the cross? Who, as he, was permitted to witness and take part in the planting of the gospel through its first and most eventful years? Who, as he, was even taken up into the sight and hearing of the open door of heaven, and then permitted to gaze in vision upon the unfolding of the sublime events of the whole future?

We must glance at the leading events of his life; and as we do so we shall more fully understand the blessings that were his portion. The date of his birth must have been very nearly the same as that of our Lord. The place where he first saw the light was Bethsaida, on the banks of the Lake of Galilee. In that neighborhood, and occasionally in Jerusalem, and most likely in connection with the fishery trade, all his early days were spent until he became a follower of Jesus. Unlike most of the first followers of Christ, those early days were spent in easy, if not in affluent, circumstances. There are several glimpses in the history which indicate that his father was a man of wealth. We read that his father Zebedee had hired servants; we are told that his mother was among the number of women who contributed to the maintenance of Jesus; we know that John received the mother of our Lord, after the crucifixion, into his house, which must have been at Jerusalem; and at the trial of our Lord it appears that he was acquainted with the high priest. All this makes it tolerably certain that John was comparatively wealthy. The supposition is more than

probable that the family was largely engaged in the important fish-trade between the city of Jerusalem and the Galilean Sea. If so, we see here a remarkable providence in providing for the supply of the bodily wants of Christ in the years of his public ministry.

At an early part of that ministry John and his brother James literally left their nets and their fishing-boats and became constant followers and attendants on the Son of man. The testimony and verdict of the Church concerning him is that he was of "a wise, affectionate, almost feminine character," but also that "love, humility, and mildness were in John the works of transforming grace;" for originally he was, what a name given him indicated, "a son of thunder."

For ever more, both on earth and in heaven, will John be spoken of as the most intimate friend of our Lord during the days of his earthly pilgrimage. He was with him in the most tender and sacred of all the scenes of those suffering years—as on the Mount of Transfiguration, in the Garden of Gethsemane, at the cross on Calvary, and at the moment of his ascension into glory. Even when Christ was dying the beloved disciple did not desert him. Amid the death-agonies of his Lord he received as a sacred legacy from his dying lips the care of the stricken mother.

After that, as we learn from tolerably reliable authority, he lived in Jerusalem for fifteen years, his circumstances enabling him to give the mother of Jesus a comfortable home until her death. Then, relieved of that sacred charge, he removed to the country of the seven churches, which became the field of his gospel labors for the rest of his days. There he preached, built up churches, confirmed believers, and so helped to establish the kingdom in that land where, of all lands, its greatest activity and success were reached during the first century. Under the persecutions of the emperor Domitian he was one of the victims who were made to endure the most cruel persecutions. Among other things which tradition records of him is the story that his persecutors cast him into a caldron of boiling oil; but he was miraculously preserved, and remained unhurt. After that he was sent to labor in the mines of Patmos, where the visions of the Apocalypse were vouchsafed to him for the edification of the Church.

Many remarkable things are related of him during the years of his old age, some of them manifestly fabrications, but some

so well authenticated that their truth cannot be doubted. We the more readily receive them when we consider that the age of miracles was at that time only passing away, and one who had been so long with Christ might well be supposed to have had this divine attestation sometimes granted him. It is quite remarkable that his name should still live in the ruins of Ephesus, where it is likely that most of his ministry was spent; for the miserable village of a few huts which is all now giving shelter to human life that remains among those desolations is called even yet Ayasolouk, or "the holy theologian." Among interesting memories of the aged saint is the story that, passing over a solitary mountain-spur, he was assailed by a band of robbers whose leader he discovered to be an apostate Christian—one who had been professedly converted under his own ministry. To this hardened man he fearlessly and faithfully appealed, touched his conscience, brought him to repentance, and led him and his desperate companions to the faith and obedience of Christ.

John is said to have reached the advanced age of about one hundred, and to have ended his days with the close of the first century. The time of the most memorable event of his whole life, the writing of this marvelous vision, has arrived; his last days on earth have come. His heart is filled with wonderful memories of the days of old, when he spent day after day with the Son of God in the flesh. He feels alone in the world, for his disciple-friends and others dearly beloved are gone. His friends are nearly all in heaven. His old Friend, the Friend of Friends, is upon the celestial throne. He is waiting and looking forward peacefully for the time to arrive when he also shall be taken up higher. Sore persecutions, it is true, are upon him, but he rejoices in them because they are endured for the sake of that Friend who is dearer to him than all the world besides. He will not shrink through dread of even more and worse suffering, but will bravely bear this last testimony even until he is dragged to the prison-mines of Patmos. It is his glory that he is a prisoner for the cause of Jesus.

One more scene of glory awaits the aged saint before he shall be taken up to the raptures of the place which Christ is preparing. It is a vision—a message sent down from his ascended Lord. It was on the Lord's day—a fact significant on every account, among others, that this is the first instance on record where that name was applied to the day of sacred rest. The Spirit descended upon him with his inspiring influences. The whole future of the Church

is laid open before him; the mind of God is revealed, and he is enabled to see with unerring reality things present and things to come. Take we then one parting glimpse of the grand old disciple, the blessed saint, so soon to be seen on earth no more. He is on the solitary island of the sea; it is the sacred day of the Lord; he is enraptured by the inspiring Spirit; he is secluded from all the things of earth; he is raised on high, beyond the sphere of the things that are temporal, and in the region of the celestials; the heavenly gates are opened, the glories within revealed, and the whole world of mankind and ages of time lie revealed beneath him. But, after its record had been made indelible, the vision passed away. Then he returned to Ephesus to wait the call of his Lord to enter into rest.

One beautiful fact concerning him in these last days of his life is so carefully recorded and is so characteristic of his tender fidelity that we cannot doubt it or pass it by without a loving remembrance. "When he had attained a great age, he became so feeble that he could not walk to the assemblies of the church. He therefore caused himself to be carried in by young men. He was no longer able to say much, but he constantly repeated the words, "*Little children, love one another.*" On being asked why he repeated this one saying, he answered, "Because it is the command of the Lord, and enough is done if this is done." How deep must have been the impression! How deep ought it to be even now as the scene rises before us! A devout but unknown pen has touchingly sketched what might have been witnessed in one of those last hours of "the holy theologian," the aged disciple whom Jesus loved:

"I'm growing very old. This weary head,
That hath so often leaned on Jesus' breast
In days long past that seem almost a dream,
Is bent and hoary with the weight of years.
These limbs that followed Him—my Master—oft
From Galilee to Judah; yea, that stood
Beneath the cross and trembled with his groans,
Refuse to bear me even through the streets
To preach unto my children. E'en my lips
Refuse to form the words my heart sends forth.
My ears are dull; they scarcely hear the sobs
Of my dear children gathered round my couch;
My eyes so dim, they cannot see their tears.
God lays his hand upon me—yea, his *hand*,
And not his *rod*—the gentle hand that I

Felt, those three years, so often pressed in mine,
In friendship such as passeth woman's love.
I'm old, so old! I cannot recollect
The faces of my friends, and I forget
The words and deeds that make up daily life;
But that dear face, and every word he spake,
Grow more distinct as others fade away,
So that I live with him and holy dead
More than with living.

"Some seventy years ago,
I was a fisher by the sacred sea.
It was at sunset. How the tranquil tide
Bathed dreamily the pebbles! How the light
Crept up the distant hills, and in its wake
Soft purple shadows wrapped the dewy fields!
And then He came and called me. Then I gazed
For the first time on that sweet face. Those eyes,
From out of which, as from a window, shone
Divinity, looked on my inmost soul
And lighted it for ever. Then his words
Broke on the silence of my heart, and made
The whole world musical. Incarnate Love
Took hold of me and claimed me for its own;
I followed in the twilight, holding fast
His mantle.

"Oh, what holy walks we had
Through harvest fields and desolate, dreary wastes!
And oftentimes He leaned upon my arm,
Wearied and wayworn. I was young and strong,
And so upbore him. Lord! now I am weak
And old and feeble. Let me rest on thee!
So put thine arm around me. Closer still!
How strong thou art! The twilight draws apace;
Come, let us leave these noisy streets, and take
The path to Bethany, for Mary's smile
Awaits us at the gate, and Martha's hands
Have long prepared the cheerful evening meal.
Come, James, the Master waits; and Peter, see,
Has gone some steps before.

"What say you, friends?
That this is Ephesus, and Christ has gone
Back to his kingdom? Ay, 'tis so, 'tis so.
I know it all; and yet, just now, I seemed
To stand once more upon my native hills

And touch my Master! Oh, how oft I've seen
The touching of his garments bring back strength
To palsied limbs! I feel it has to mine.
Up! bear me once more to my church—once more
There let me tell them of a Saviour's love;
For, by the sweetness of my Master's voice
Just now, I think he must be very near—
Coming, I trust, to break the veil which time
Has worn so thin that I can see beyond
And watch his footsteps.

"So, raise up my head.
How dark it is! I cannot seem to see
The faces of my flock. Is that the sea
That murmurs so, or is it weeping? Hush!
My little children! God so loved the world
He gave his Son; so love ye one another;
Love God and man. Amen. Now bear me back.
My legacy unto an angry world is this,
I feel my work is finished. Are the streets so full?
What call the folk my name? "The Holy John"?
Nay, write me rather "Jesus Christ's beloved,"
And lover of my children.

"Lay me down
Once more upon my couch, and open wide
The eastern window. See! there comes a light
Like that which broke upon my soul at eve,
When, in the dreary isle of Patmos, Gabriel came
And touched me on the shoulder. See! it grows
As when we mounted toward the pearly gates.
I know the way! I trod it once before;
And hark! it is the song the ransomed sung,
Of glory to the Lamb! How loud it sounds!
And that unwritten one! Methinks my soul
Can join it now. But who are those who crowd
The shining way? Say! joy! 'tis the eleven,
With Peter first; how eagerly he looks!
How bright the smiles are beaming upon James' face!
I am the last. Once more we are complete
To gather round the Paschal feast. My place
Is next my Master. O my Lord! my Lord!
How bright thou art, and yet the very same
I loved in Galilee! 'Tis worth the hundred years
To feel this bliss! So lift me up, dear Lord,
Unto thy bosom. There shall I abide."

# CHAPTER IV.

## MESSAGES, SYMBOLS, SYMMETRY, AND SEVEN.

### 1. MESSAGES FROM HEAVEN.

Messages from heaven! The thought is a startling one, and we should not allow familiarity with it to take from its impressiveness. Messages from heaven! Important must they be, else Jesus had not sent them. Their special importance is implied in the charge given to John: "I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last; and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia." It is also implied in the benediction, "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein; for the time is at hand."

Messages from heaven! Blessed be God that our lot has been so cast that we have heard them, that they are constantly sounding in our ears, and that their tones may warn or woo us in every undertaking of our lives. If a volume written by a human sage engages the attention of scholars, and they strive unceasingly to master its contents, how much greater should be the desire to know what God has said in these utterances from the skies!

### 2. INTENDED FOR ALL TIMES AND PLACES.

These messages are from the Son of God and from the supreme throne. They come clothed with the highest authority in the universe. But for whom were they especially intended?

While they were primarily designed for the seven churches of Asia Minor to which they were addressed, they were also, without a doubt, intended for the whole Church in all times and places. Many things in them make this certain. The charge which is found in each of the messages: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches," makes it evident that in their revelation the Church universal was contemplated. They come to us as do the warning words of our Lord: "What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch." Indeed, it is made positive that the messages were not restricted to the churches to which they were severally addressed, for in one of them we find the decisive

words, "And all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts." The same thing is implied in their being addressed to *seven* churches. Seven is, among other things, the number of completeness, and its use here teaches in a very significant way that the complete Church of all time is intended. "Christianity, represented by those seven churches, was the true audience to which the Author addressed himself."

In corroboration of this it will be seen that all kinds of churches and of church life are depicted here. These seven specimens embrace every aspect of that spiritual life which is produced by the contact of the gospel with the natural heart. Each message sets forth with wonderful comprehensiveness a class either of evils in doctrine and practice or of the excellent fruits of the Spirit. Here are those who allow the ardor of their piety to abate, with all the attendant evils; those who look with complacency upon the greatest errors and affiliate with the openly profane; those who make a loud profession, but at the same time scarcely raise a finger to help the cause of which they boast; and those who, as to the interests of the soul and God and eternity, are virtually dead. On the other hand, here are those who are wide awake and active in all that pertains to the welfare of Messiah's kingdom, who toil for it, pray for it, suffer for it; those who are zealous for the truth; those who guard against every appearance of error and wrong and guilt; and those who, in the face of every opposition and discouragement, stand up for the right, the true, and the good. All these classes are successively addressed, and when the characteristics are followed out into their various ramifications, it will be found that the messages cover every form of church life, both good and bad. To adopt, in substance, the words of Archbishop Trench: "We meet the church of Smyrna, face to face with danger and death; the church of Sardis, at ease, declining into sinful lethargy; the church of Laodicea, with abundant means and loud profession, yet doing nothing for the furtherance of the truth; the church of Philadelphia, with little strength, yet accomplishing a great work for Christ; the church of Ephesus, intolerant of error, but with love waning; the church of Thyatira, diligent in work, but careless of doctrinal purity; the church of Pergamos, sorely persecuted, and sinking under it."

At first glance the addresses to the churches seem to be all local in their aim—to be intended merely for the state of things in those particular places; but, as they are closely followed out, they are seen to burst through all boundaries and sweep outward

to the ends of the earth and the most distant boundaries of time. For instance, at first it would appear that only for the particular church of Ephesus, and for that early day, was the rebuke given, "Thou hast left thy first love;" but it sounds onward and downward through the ages, meeting declensions in piety an hundred times and an hundred times again. Under Constantine the Great, Christianity became the religion of the empire, and the brightest prospects were dawning upon the race; but soon, alas! was there need for the warning, "Thou hast left thy first love." The old Waldensians bravely testified and toiled and suffered and glorified the heavenly King, but an eclipse came over their zeal, and to them must be uttered the rebuke to Ephesus, "Thou hast left thy first love." Dark ages brooded over the whole world, and the Church, once the fair and beautiful bride of Christ, seemed lost in the wilderness; but her loving Lord, instead of casting her off in scorn, speaks to her in the old tones of wounded affection: "Thou hast left thy first love." A new day of hope dawned upon mankind when the Reformation gave promise that the emancipated gospel would soon redeem the race; but in a little while there must again come from the patient Master the old appeal, "Thou hast left thy first love." In the vicissitudes of the kingdom it seemed that the heroism of the Cross had reached its climax in the martyr days of France and Holland and Scotland and other suffering lands, when, alas! there too must come the old lamentation, "Thou hast left thy first love." Times of revival came from the presence of the Lord and blessed the churches in the days of Edwards and Wesley and Whitfield and Chalmers and Howel Harris and other eminent saints, as the Holy Spirit came down in great power and thousands were converted; only a few years after each revival the tender Saviour might well have taken up the lamentation, "Thou hast left thy first love." Within the memory of us all there have been seasons of religious awakening when many souls were brought into the kingdom, and all was happiness and hope until a mournful change crept on, and we can imagine the sorrowful appeal of the grieved Redeemer, "Thou hast left thy first love." Has there not been a time with most of us when our own souls have been all aglow with affection for both God and man; but the world has stolen in, and earthly attractions have grown stronger, and then the mournful appeal of the Beloved of our souls might well have been heard: "Thou hast left thy first love."

Thus it is that this and every other one of the messages was

intended for every age of the Church and for every soul enlisted in the cause of the Redeemer.

### 3. GREAT NUMBER OF SYMBOLS.

One of the things which first arrests our attention in this passage is the multitude of remarkable symbols with which it abounds. Both their number and their character are such as to impress the mind. The great number of them first demands attention. We glance over the chapters and see how they abound: "Seven stars in the right hand of the Son of man;" "golden candlesticks;" "tree of life in the midst of the paradise of God;" "Satan's seat;" "hidden manna;" "white stone;" "new name;" "eyes like a flame of fire;" "synagogue of Satan;" "crown of life;" "pillar in the temple of my God;" "gold tried in the fire;" "eye-salve;" "walk with me in white;" "spue thee out of my mouth;" "open the door." Their great number is startling. They are in every message and in every part of each message—in the various titles given to the Son of man, in the censures, in the counsels, in the warnings, and in the promises.

### 4. THE DESIGN OF SUCH SYMBOLS.

There must have been a purpose in this use of symbols. It is so remarkable that it could not have been without design. They are emblems, figures, some of them very striking and beautiful, and, as such, they doubtless had a poetic value; but there must have been something far higher than that. What was that higher design? The answer to this question will aid us materially in interpreting the whole passage.

(1) This symbolism was clearly *intended to make a deep impression*. It was to arrest attention and fix it, and so fill the mind of the reader more fully with the truths communicated.

(2) This peculiar symbolism was used as *a sort of common language which all could understand*. The reader might not understand Latin or Greek or Hebrew, but here were characters he could comprehend, whatever might be his age or culture or country. The ideas, the thoughts, were imparted in a form that would be definite and forcible.

(3) Such symbolic language *brings out points of truth, shades of meaning, and beauties of thought* which didactic language would struggle in vain to produce. A single symbol sometimes lays open a whole field of instruction of the greatest value. It conveys

shades of thought, or makes thought plain or presses it home, in a manner otherwise impossible.

(4) The use of symbols is calculated to *excite curiosity*, and so to make a deeper impression. The very difficulty of reaching their signification, and the study they require, necessarily arouse the attention and fix in the memory the truths they convey. Studied in the light of these emblems, the truths are not likely to be soon forgotten.

(5) The uncommonness, the beauty, and the sublimity of the symbols are calculated *to produce exalted impressions of the subject.* They aid in raising it to its proper dignity. The Holy Ghost would not have prompted such an elaborate presentation of the truth had not that truth been worthy of the robe in which it is clothed. Its splendid ornaments reveal the priceless value of the treasure they adorn.

(6) The splendid imagery indicates that the divine Author *is a God of order, beauty, dignity*, as well as of holiness. Coming from the divine mind in that particular form, they hint most unmistakably what that mind is. Their own nature tells us plainly the nature of their source. We cannot dwell upon the charming picture which God has made and then imagine that he is indifferent to what is exalting and refining.

(7) By many sober-minded and trustworthy authors the opinion has been maintained that the use of such symbolic language *was needed for the safety of the people* to whom it was immediately addressed. Our Lord said concerning similar symbolic language to his followers, "Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables." Those were days of merciless persecution. Those who received the messages were surrounded by spies and persecutors who thirsted for their blood. Plain language inculcating the supreme adoration of Jesus would have sent those who yielded obedience to torture and the stake. The supreme worship of King Jesus was sedition against the emperor; hence language that was not understood by their pagan oppressors was necessary for the Christians of that day. Had plainer language been used, the vigilance of the enemies of Christ would have seized upon it, and the cause would have been the more cruelly persecuted.

(8) But there was a need greater than any of these for the use of so much and such expressive symbolic language. It was that of creating or clearly defining religious ideas among a pagan com-

munity by whom they were before either unknown or but very imperfectly understood. The same necessity did not exist when the gospel was first preached among the Jews, for they already had tolerably correct ideas of the elements of spiritual things. The pagans, however, to whom these messages first came had neither the ideas nor the words by which to express the truths of godliness. To them, God was Jupiter or some other fabulous being; redemption, a loathsome sacrifice; worship, an impious scene of orgies; and heaven, a sensual elysium. Concerning one only true God, the incarnation of the eternal Son, atonement by the death of Immanuel, purity of life, and a spiritual immortality, they had no conception whatever. The very ideas of these things had to be created among them. They had no words to express them. The old phraseology of religion wrought into the Jewish mind through centuries was unavailing to the pagans; hence symbols for these new ideas had to be made use of—symbols of things which they could see and understand. This, doubtless, was the chief reason for the large number and the peculiar character of the emblems used in this passage. It had to do with the gospel's first encounter with paganism, and therefore new, peculiar, and impressive imagery was needed to convey the thoughts of the divine Revealer.

Such, doubtless, were the leading advantages of the remarkable symbols in these messages. They were beautifully ornamental, but they were also far higher in their design. The Lord sent his messages in that form which would make the deepest impression—would be understood by men of every land and age—would bring out points and shades of truth the most minute and delicate—would excite sanctified curiosity, and so more thoroughly fill the mind—would exalt the reader by the very dignity of its words and figures—would impress all with a sense of God's pleasure in order and beauty—would aid in shielding the faithful from the cruelty of their persecutors—and, above all, would produce correct ideas of Christ and his gospel.

### 5. NOVELTY OF THE SYMBOLS.

We have spoken, in the general, of the great number of the symbols found here, and of the great designs in them; but there are other peculiarities which we must not pass by. There is an originality in these figures which is most remarkable. The remark of Trench is most appropriate: "Nor can any one, I think, attentively studying, fail to be struck with what one might ven-

ture to call the originality of these seven epistles, with their entire unlikeness, in some points at least, to anything else in Scripture."

The symbols are novel in thought, in form, in phraseology, in all their surroundings. Many that are used here are not found in any other part of the Bible. Many of them are perfectly original—so much so that there is not anything like them in the whole range of literature, sacred or secular. Some of them are very beautiful. Some of them present the truth with great vividness.

Allow the mind to fasten itself to some of them, and then see into what strange and impressive forms they soon grow. Look into the divine arcana, and behold the marvelous shapes that arise. Yonder is a pillar on which is engraved some mystic name never heard before; yonder, stately forms move before us in garments of snowy whiteness; yonder is a white stone treasured up as a secret token, the undying bond of loving hearts; yonder is a brilliant eye, of more than earthly glory, that reads you through and through; yonder is a sword with two edges, keen and bright, before which every enemy must fall to the dust; yonder is a ransomed saint on the great white throne, side by side with the glorified Immanuel; yonder is the adorable Son of the Most High standing and knocking at the closed door of a poor sinner's heart. But to depict all would be to go through the whole passage almost word by word.

All this was not without design. Every word, every figure, had its place. It is a grand principle as enunciated by a great Christian father: "Every word, if rightly viewed, effects a special purpose." Every word, every figure, every symbol, had its place. The very novelty of the symbolism is calculated to strengthen the evidence that the messages were a *special* communication from the great Head of the Church, calculated to arrest the attention and fix it, and so cause the truth to be more firmly established in the mind and in the heart.

### 6. THE SYMBOLS TAKEN FROM LOCAL OBJECTS.

Another noticeable feature of the symbols used in these chapters is that most of them were prompted and shaped by some event or some object of the time and place. Some existing custom, some well-known object, some historical event, or something with which everybody in the place was familiar, was made to represent or illustrate some spiritual truth. This peculiarity

must be kept distinctly before us, for it is not only curious in itself, but it will also aid us in the interpretation.

Except the symbols taken from the Old Testament, all that are found in the messages are of this kind. All were founded upon certain local things, and they served to set forth religious truths with surprising vividness.

Let us look at some of the benefits arising from the abundant use of this peculiar symbolism.

(1) The diversity of character and nationality, of habits, of classes of people, of modes of life, and other distinctions found in those cities, furnished an endless variety for the use of such imagery, and rendered it most effectual in conveying the mind of the Spirit to them all.

(2) Similar to this peculiarity of the messages was the habit of our Lord. He illustrated the truths of the gospel by "the lilies of the field," by "the fishes of the sea" and "the birds of the air," by "a woman sweeping her house," by "a sower sowing his seed," by "a shepherd watching over his flock," and by multitudes of other objects of every-day life. Thus did Christ in the days of his flesh, and thus did he in all these messages, by using objects which were near and familiar to those to whom he wrote.

(3) The use of such symbols made the truth more plain. It caused the doctrines of the gospel to be more perfectly understood. It tended also to bring the duties of religion down to the habits, feelings, and avocations of every-day life.

(4) It gave an opportunity of showing the superiority of the religion of Jesus Christ to every form of paganism, and aided in bringing out its excellencies in a way that was not likely to excite opposition.

(5) It laid the foundation for proof of the divine origin of the Scriptures which could be used in all subsequent ages; for what, save the unerring Spirit of God, could record so accurately events and objects which had sunk into the oblivion of centuries?

### 7. OLD TESTAMENT ALLUSIONS.

Here is another feature of the symbols which should be closely examined. Its great advantages can be easily appreciated. Let us look at a few specimens taken from the pages of the old economy. "The tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God"—this takes us back to the most remote ages, and connects their momentous events with the closing pages of the

Book of God and with the latter days of time. "Seven golden candlesticks"—the very sound carries us back to the heroic days of the wilderness and of the kings, and we stand amid the sacred objects of the tabernacle and the temple. "To him will I give to eat of the hidden manna"—those old historic words tell us of God's tender care over his people in their darkest days, and assure us that heaven will yet be opened for the descent of blessings upon the blood-bought Church of the true Israel. "The doctrine of Balaam who taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel"—as we read, there pass before us the way in which God led his ancient people, the strange interest he sometimes took on their behalf, and the sure deliverance he always wrought out for them. "He that hath the key of David"—this reference brings up the brightest days of the nation's glory, and tells of the still greater glory and happiness with which their heavenly King would have crowned them, had the nation only been faithful to him. "That woman Jezebel"—the strange vicissitudes of the nation throughout the years of its decline are here recalled, and the depths of its guilt exposed as a perpetual warning. "As the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers"—the prophecies of many a century gone by are here recalled, the admonitions of the Most High therein are reaffirmed, and the sovereignty of King Jesus proclaimed anew for the warning of his enemies and the encouragement of his Church. These and many other allusions to the ancient Scriptures are found throughout the messages, and accomplish the supremely wise purpose of Him who is the Spirit of all truth.

What the purposes were in so many references to the Old Testament is a profitable study. Believing, as we do, that every word of these epistles, as of all other Scripture, has its own appointed errand, and that errand one of great significance, we are held in adoring wonder at the multitude, the splendor, the riches, and the exalted aims of the emblems taken from the writings of those inspired men who lived before our earth had witnessed the footsteps of the Son of God in the flesh. Behold the wisdom manifested in those Old Testament references! They called up sacred associations of the past ages to the minds of the many Jewish readers, instructed them through things with which they were already familiar, and so tended to secure their good will. They familiarized the Gentile readers with the phraseology of the Old Testament, drew them toward those holy oracles, and filled their minds with the grand truths which God had communicated to

his people in the ages that were past. They made it manifest that the same mind inspired the Old and the New Testament, that the same grand design reigned in both, and that they were parts of the one great revelation of the mind of Jehovah. They thus tended to establish the identity of the two dispensations—the one as preparatory to, and the other as the glorious consummation of, the redeeming work of the Son of God.

We have thus endeavored to indicate the leading peculiarities of the symbolism of this part of the Apocalypse. It is a subject of great interest and value. The Holy Ghost manifestly laid much stress upon it. In this peculiarity there is no other passage of Scripture like these messages. It is a comprehensive subject, for it spreads out into many branches, each of which has peculiar attractions of its own. It is a subject which must interest because of its beauty, its novelty, and the matchless skill displayed in every one of its elements. It is, moreover, a subject of prime importance, for the whole meaning and spirit of the passage depend upon our getting hold of this key to its interpretation.

### 8. EXTRAORDINARY SYMMETRY IN THE MESSAGES.

The systematic arrangement of these messages, the exact plan on which they are constructed, the identity of the order of certain prominent points in them, the artistic skill displayed in the order of thought and in the use of language, are most noteworthy. We are safe in asserting that in no other portion of Scripture is there such striking, exact, and significant system as in this. In this respect it is doubtful whether there is to be found in any writing of any kind, sacred or secular, such exact order as here. It is so perfectly systematic as to have an indescribable charm. Most heartily do we endorse the assertion of an eminent writer: "There never was a book penned with that artifice of this of the Apocalypse." No other portion of Scripture is so charming in its system and so exact in numbers and relations. Like some splendid cathedral which has been the admiration of ages, every adornment is in its fitting place, every proportion is according to exact number, all conspires to one effect, diversity gives prominence to the wondrous symmetry, and all is most sublime.

The study of this symmetry in the messages is an alluring and a profitable one. Even if we were impelled to it by nothing higher than a wholesome curiosity, it would be a worthy pursuit. But there is something beyond this and far higher. This feature

of the messages must be significant. There must have been a high and heavenly purpose in a form of revelation that was so peculiar. There must have been an end whose importance was in proportion to the peculiarity of the method of the revelation.

With this impression of the wonderful system according to which the messages are arranged would we enter upon its study. We would look first at *the orderly method in which the various churches are introduced.* They are not addressed at random, but according to an exact plan. Ephesus is first addressed, because nearest to Patmos, and because a sort of metropolis of the whole country; then Smyrna, the next to the left, if one undertook to take the cities as in a sort of circuit; then Pergamos, next in order to the left; then Thyatira; then Sardis; then Philadelphia; then, last, Laodicea, after which the round would take us back to Ephesus, the place of starting. This is the obvious geographical order of arrangement; but, as we shall see, there was a deeper —undoubtedly a providential—order in the naming of the churches, and consequently in the messages sent them.

Second, *there is a significant method in the structure of the messages.* They are all framed on precisely the same plan. In each message there are seven leading points. As the messages are seven in number, from the seven Spirits of God, and to the seven churches, so we find that there are seven prominent thoughts in each of them. This is the general rule, with only slight deviations in one or two cases, as might be expected in a matter that is necessarily so complicated.

At present we would merely give a general statement of this plan on which all the messages are constructed. Hereafter we shall dwell more fully upon each of the points, both separately and unitedly, as well as in comparison. We place them all together here in order that their arrangement may be the better seen and understood.

In each of the seven messages we find these seven points or elements: (1) The title of the Son of man—different in each. (2) In each church there is something censured—save in the instances of Smyrna and Philadelphia. (3) In each there is something applauded—with one exception. (4) Some counsel is given to each. (5) To each there is a threatening in case of unfaithfulness. (6) In each there is a promise to those who overcome. (7) Each of them concludes with the words, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches."

Third, there are certain things which are precisely the same in

each of the messages: (1) In each of them we find the expression, "He that overcometh," showing that all the churches would have to strive and contend for the faith. (2) In each there is a symbol taken from some local thing—some symbol that could be applied to that church and no other. Such symbols are these: "Nicolaitans," "synagogue of Satan," "white stone," "that woman Jezebel," "white raiments," "open door," "spue thee out of my mouth." (3) In each there is a central point around which everything else is arranged. We shall presently refer to this more fully. (4) In each we find the caution, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches."

Such is the remarkable system which prevails in all these messages. As might be expected, there are deviations from it, but they are unimportant. In compositions so many and so complex there are very slight departures from the prevailing rule. Perfection required this. Diversity in the midst of uniformity marks the highest works of God. Accordingly, the elements of these messages are freely modified, while at the same time the great outlines are abiding and invariable.

Fourth, there is a surprising system in that there is not only a connection, but *a beautiful gradation, in the leading elements of the messages.* They are not isolated in the matters they contain, but they are so related that in all their leading elements they form a completed embodiment of the subject.

(1) There is a gradation in the character of the churches, so that in them we have specimens of almost all classes. Against the two churches Philadelphia and Smyrna there is no charge whatever; Ephesus had lost its first love; Pergamos tampered with evil; Thyatira affiliated with corruption; Laodicea was disgustingly lukewarm; Sardis was grossly hypocritical—with a name to live, but in reality dead.

(2) There is a gradation in the threatenings. The mildest is that of removing the candlestick—taking away gospel privileges. The worst is, "I will spue thee out of my mouth"—utter abandonment, rejection. Between these extremes every degree of terror is denounced againt those who should continue in obstinate unfaithfulness.

(3) There is a gradation in the promises. Nothing could be more beautiful than this. From the very lowest to the very highest, every shade of blessedness is assured to those who shall prove faithful to the Lord. (*a*) The first and lowest is the promise to the faithful of Ephesus: "To him that overcometh will I give

to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." This is simply an assurance of the continuance of existence for ever. (*b*) The second is the promise to the suffering but victorious believers of Smyrna: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." This is a degree higher, but it is merely an engagement to bestow a victorious reward of glory. (*c*) The third is the promise to the steadfast amid persecutions in Pergamos: "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it." This is a great advance, as it engages the blessings of the perpetual and most intimate friendship of the divine Son of God. (*d*) The fourth is the promise to the unyielding heroes of Thyatira: "He that overcometh and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers; even as I received of my Father." This is higher still. It is an assurance of going forward steadily and for ever in victory and power and glory. (*e*) The fifth is the promise to the few noble and upright ones of Sardis: "He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment, and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels." More exalted still is this engagement. It is the assurance of evermore enjoying the very effulgence of purity and glory. (*f*) The sixth is the promise to the humble, suffering, but patient ones in Philadelphia: "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out; and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is the New Jerusalem." This is higher than any promise before it, for it is an engagement of being identified in glory with the exalted Son of God. (*g*) The seventh is the promise to the most faithful because most tempted believers of Laodicea: "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne." This is the highest promise of all—the highest of which we can conceive, even that of being associated and identified with the Lord of glory in the government of the world. Such are these seven promises in their various degrees or shades of blessedness. Imagination can frame nothing so glorious as the prospect they hold out to the suffering, tried, but steadfast followers of Christ.

### 9. DESIGN OF THIS SYMMETRY.

In the foregoing particulars we have presented a concise sketch of the wonderful system which prevails in the messages. We have seen that this system characterizes the order in which the churches are introduced; it marks the structure of each message; it is seen in certain things which are common to them all; it is made more striking by a few slight deviations; and it is crowned by the beautiful gradation which prevails in almost every part. Most of these points will come up hereafter for more full consideration, but we have seen enough already to assure us that in the elaborate presentation of this extraordinary system there must have been some special purpose in the mind of our Lord. There must have been some motive far higher than merely to make the revelation well rounded out. It was designed, among other things, to be a special intimation that a well-ordered plan would prevail in conducting the affairs predicted in revelation—the affairs of the Church and of the world.

(1) It manifests an attractive attribute of Jehovah. It shows that he is a God of order. The observance of exact system in his works is not beneath him. This is his nature. Every page and element of revelation makes this evident. Every word and point in these messages makes it manifest that this belongs to his nature. This thought is most comforting in the midst of our anxious anticipations concerning the future.

(2) We see that the same mind reigns in nature and in the Bible. The whole passage is a counterpart of that regularity of plan which we find in the natural world. It is most exalting to trace the evidences that the same mind presides in both kingdoms. The same perfect order which we find here is also found in all history and in all the works of creation.

We glance at a few instances; probably the widest range of investigation would show it to be invariable. We behold an exact and wonderful system prevailing in the realm of nature, in the facts which science is day by day bringing to light. We see it in the grand operations of the material universe—in that the law of gravitation, with its invariable measures, prevails throughout the whole—in that the revolutions of the heavenly bodies are so exactly ordered that the ages, years, months, days, hours, even minutes, which they measure continue with most perfect regularity—in that occultations and eclipses can be calculated centuries before as to the moment of their occurrence. We

see it in the arrangements that pertain to our earth—in the exact adjustment of summer and winter, of seed-time and harvest, of day and night—in the fixed numbers and proportions of chemistry—in the exact shapes into which crystals form themselves. We see it in the arrangements of the vegetable world, in the similarity of form, proportion, function, use, that prevail respectively in the several genera and species. We see it in the animal world, especially in the structure and characteristics of the human race —in the arrangements of the several members and organs of the body, so symmetrical and so invariable in their uses and in their relations each to the other and to the whole—in that the average length of life, not merely of the entire period, but of its several stages, remains so nearly the same—in that the numbers of the sexes are so nearly the same, not merely at birth, but at the several periods of existence. We behold it in innumerable instances, in the contemplation of which we become bewildered and delighted—in the octaves of music, in the vibrations of sound, and in the waves of light. Everywhere among the works of God we find the same exact order—everywhere the same, and yet, amidst all, a diversity which makes the system the more conspicuous and the beauty the more charming.

Who can for one moment doubt but that these perfect plans everywhere found—the one in the works of nature and the other in the wonderful system of the numbers, proportions, and gradations in these messages—are both from one and the same glorious mind, even that of the Most High God? Infidelity may deny, doubt, and speculate, but there are the facts which their madness cannot overthrow. There are the unchangeable proportions, laws, and order, and we are sure that they are all from the same eternal, unchangeable, and all-perfect wisdom and power of Jehovah.

(3) In every feature and line of this amazingly perfect system we find indubitable proof that the book which contains it must have been divinely inspired. From it we know assuredly that the Bible sprung from the heart and mind of God. This word which our Lord spake, which the inspired pen recorded, which generation after generation of the holiest and most blessed of saints has studied with rapture,—this word is true, unchangeable, and all-perfect as a revelation of the innermost heart of that God with whom we have to do. Sceptics might as well reason against the laws which govern gravitation or bring about the eclipse or cause the morning dew as against the principles involved in this system, more perfect than uninspired wisdom ever conceived.

(4) We have the assurance that, since the messages are from our enthroned Lord, the perfect system of divine government revealed therein will be realized in all coming events in the Church, in the world, in the whole future track of human destiny. How blessed beyond imagination that it will be so! Sad, indeed, would be the outlook for humanity were it not for this prospect! To look forward with the thought that there is no plan in the changes which are awaiting our race, no divine mind to direct its progress, no protection from the anarchy of selfishness and cruelty and lies, no safe bourne toward which we are tending,—this would crush out all hope and fill every heart with despair! But this significant system of the messages gives us a strangely impressive intimation that it will be otherwise. It is itself a type of the well-ordered plan which will guide the whole future of the Church, of the world, of the souls of individuals, and of the whole human race! From it we have an assurance that all the affairs of the Church, for which the world stands, will be conducted according to a prearranged plan of heavenly wisdom. In no sense is the future of Christ's kingdom to be at haphazard or dependent on the mere caprice of men. All is under the unerring control of God. He has planned every feature of the coming ages. All will be moulded by his all-wise providence.

### 10. SEVEN.

The climax of this remarkable system in the messages is reached in the strange prominence given to the number *seven*. As we read the messages we are impressed with the significant use of this number at every point. There are seven spirits before the throne, seven golden candlesticks, seven stars in the right hand of the Son of man, seven churches of Asia, and seven points or elements in each of the seven messages. As we read on through the book of Revelation this peculiarity becomes more and more striking. We find the lamb with seven horns and seven eyes, the book with seven seals, the seven angels with seven trumpets, the seven thunders, the seven vials with the seven last plagues, the seven heads of the dragon and the seven crowns upon those heads, the seven mountains and the seven kings, the earthquake destroying seven thousand men, the witnesses prophesying in sackcloth the half of seven years and lying unburied the half of seven days. In still other instances we find this number used in the Apocalypse. In no part of the Scriptures is it made so prominent as in this.

At the same time, however, it does prevail strangely through-

out all the pages of the Bible. This is well worthy of close study. We begin with God resting from the work of creation on the seventh day. Among the Israelites every seventh day was a Sabbath; every seventh year was a sabbatical year; seven times seven years brought the Jubilee; the paschal lamb was killed on the twice seventh day of the month, the feast lasted seven days, and seven times seven days after the passover was the feast of weeks; the feast of tabernacles lasted seven days; persons suspected of leprosy were shut up seven days, and when cleansed they were sprinkled seven times; at the taking of Jericho there were to be seven priests with seven trumpets, who would march around the city for seven days, but on the last day seven times; Naaman was to wash in the Jordan seven times; in the writings of Solomon, wisdom had her seven pillars; Jeremiah predicted a captivity to his people of seven times ten years; Daniel foretold a period of seven times ten weeks to the anointing of the Most Holy. Matthew divided the time from Abraham to Christ into three periods of twice seven generations each; our Lord had seven times ten disciples; there were seven deacons in the early church; and our Lord enjoined it on Peter that he should "forgive not until seven times, but seventy times seven."

Whatever may be the special significance of this number as a symbol, or whatever may be the reasons for its use, it is eminently the number of the Bible. It must be evident to every thoughtful reader of the Scriptures that certain *numbers* are frequently used therein with special significance, and also that *seven* is the most prominent of those thus employed.

### 11. MEANING OF THE NUMBER SEVEN.

The constant use of *seven* in the messages must be significant and instructive. Not for a moment can we suppose that our Divine Lord would make such remarkable use of a number without an instructive purpose.

What, then, is the origin, and what the meaning, of *seven* as used in these messages? The usual explanation of the frequent use of this number in the Scriptures is that God rested from his creative work on the seventh day, and hence its constant use ever afterward in the Sacred Book. This is correct so far as it goes; but it is certainly permissible that we should go farther and search whether there may not be wise reasons why he rested on the seventh day rather than on the sixth, the eighth, or any other.

All the ways of Jehovah are guided by infinitely wise reasons. What were the reasons here? What is known concerning his glorious designs in creation and redemption, in Scripture and providence, and especially in that grand announcement concerning his everlasting Son: "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by him, and for him,"—all these have begotten in the mind of the writer the conviction that the number of the day of rest was determined in view of the great work of that Son —namely, Redemption. "*All things were created for him*," the seventh day of rest, amongst other things.

There is a peculiarity in the number *seven* which makes it especially applicable to the great work of redemption, which by divine covenant was contemplated from the beginning. Not only are the Hebrew words for *seven* and *oath* (by which the covenant was confirmed) from the same root, but the number *seven* is in itself an appropriate symbol for redemption or the covenant thereof. This matter is worthy of special attention.

A few words, however, at this point concerning two other sacred numbers in the Scriptures will aid us materially in reaching the full significance of the numbers in question. Certain numbers occupy too prominent a place on the inspired pages, are used in too many different connections, and too evidently have they a special purpose, for us to slight them or, as many do, to sneer at an earnest effort to interpret them. That wild and absurd applications have been made of them will not justify us in tossing them aside as meaningless. If we apply rational methods to the interpretation of these scriptural numbers, examining their significance in all the various connections in which they are found, it cannot be an impossible or even a very difficult thing to discover the intent of the Holy Spirit in their use. They must mean something. As divinely-used symbols they must mean much; as such they teach and impress important truths. We now look at a few of them, the understanding of which may aid us in more clearly comprehending why the number *seven* is made so much use of in all the messages.

Attention is first directed to the number *three*. On this, however, we need not dwell, as nothing is more palpable than that it is the symbol of God—Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—the Trinity.

Next to this we look at the number *four*. Of this we find not

very many applications. Those, however, which we do find are emphatic and plain in their meaning. Let us take a single example in full as we find it in the book of Daniel, 7:2, 3: "Daniel spake and said, I saw in my vision by night, and, behold, the four winds of the heaven strove upon the great sea, and four great beasts came up from the sea, diverse one from another." More briefly, in other places we have "four rivers of Paradise;" "four living creatures;" "four winds;" "four notable horns;" "four workmen;" "four chariots;" "four corners of the earth." We can scarcely mistake the significance of this number as it thus lies before us. Everything in its use points to the world, earth, man. *Four is the number of the world*, of which mankind is the head. *Four* is the Scriptural symbol for man, as *three* is for God.

We now return to the consideration of the number *seven* with the aid we may derive from some knowledge of the other sacred numbers just considered. We have suggested that it is the symbol of the covenant of redemption in Christ. We have said that an indication of its being the covenant number is that the very word *seven* and the word for *oath* are from the same Hebrew root. But how comes it that seven rather than any other number should be the symbol of the covenant or of the atonement?

We have already seen that the established and well-understood numerical symbol for God is *three*. We have also seen that the undoubted scriptural symbol for man is *four*. But *three* and *four* brought together, or added, are seven. Hence it seems to be appropriate that seven should be used as the symbol of God and man brought together or reconciled. In symbolic language this could not be more impressively set forth.

The great object contemplated in the covenant of redemption is God and man reconciled—and reconciled in Christ. It is God and man brought together. This is the fundamental thought in the whole gospel, in the whole Bible. It is the very central and all-essential idea of all religion, and the very word religion—to bind back or bind anew—implies it. It means to bind again, to bind back, God and man whom sin had separated. It is the very thought and substance of the atonement—*the at-one-ment—God and man united; three and four brought together; seven.* The essential idea of the atonement, the covenant, the reconcilement effected by the mediation and death of Christ, is *God and man at one.* Most appropriately, then, and most significantly is *seven, in Scripture, the invariable symbol of the atonement.* All the Bible through it is used in connection with atonement and reconciliation. In

proof of this we find that seven is the number of all sacrifices by which the atonement was typified, of all sacrifices and devotements connected with the covenant, and of all in the old economy which illustrated or set forth forgiveness.

This theory of the significance of *seven* is the theory of many of the most reliable and best of scholars, such as Stuart, Hengstenberg, and others. It is not, therefore, a mere untried and ephemeral conjecture.

### 12. COMPREHENSIVENESS OF THE MESSAGES.

This is a general characteristic of Scripture. We may specify the writing of God on the two tables of stone, which, in ten brief precepts, contains all the great duties of religion, or we may point to the "Sermon on the Mount," which, in three chapters, contains a complete manifestation of all the great principles which distinguish the kingdom of Christ on earth; or we may name still more comprehensive passages which contain the sum of the gospel in a single sentence, such as, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." All these are wonderfully comprehensive, but hardly any of them are so full as the passage which contains these messages. We may mention two or three particulars in which this characteristic is seen.

(1) General principles, either good or bad, are laid down, and then, under each of them, many particulars of the same class are presented. For instance, in the message to the church of Pergamos we have: "Thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication." This presents the general sin of tampering with evil. Then every degree and form and offspring of the evil is condemned in it. On the other side, to the church of Philadelphia we have the commendation: "Thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name." Here is the general principle of fidelity, and under it are embraced every aspect and particular of that virtue. This peculiarity is found to pervade all the messages and to make them exceedingly prolific in instruction. It will sometimes be found that a general principle extends to other things which are not of the same sort, as when Paul advises the abstaining from meat that had been offered to idols if a brother was thereby offended, and then carries the principle so far as to teach that we should deny ourselves

even in lawful things if they should appear to be stumbling-blocks to others.

(2) In these messages every word becomes a germ of thought. These germs, under the quickening influence of diligent study, soon grow and bring forth abundance of fruit. As a mere act of the intellect there is a peculiar fascination in following out these principles, germs, beginnings, and tracing out the exuberance into which they develop.

If we take any one of the messages and give it even a superficial investigation, we shall be astonished at the number of points or particulars it comprises. Let us make the trial. There is (*a*) a declaration that God is observant of the course pursued; (*b*) some attribute of the glorified Lord adduced; (*c*) something in the church rebuked; (*d*) some approbation expressed; (*e*) some advice given; (*f*) a threatening uttered against unfaithfulness; (*g*) a promise extended to those who obey; (*h*) a solemn caution to give good heed; (*i*) and then often an emphatic warning that the Lord would soon come. Then each one of these seven or eight points may itself be extended out into a multitude of other subordinate ones. This is in a single message; but when we take the several points as they are found in the various messages, and compare them, classify them, and search out the different shades in which they present each thought, as well as the different thoughts, then the field which is opened up seems absolutely boundless.

To the writer, in the whole passage there is nothing more wonderful than the amount of matter which is compressed into such narrow bounds. Look closely into it. Look at the agreement of all parts with each other, at the symbols gathered from every quarter, at the reference to Old Testament incidents, at the progress of both promises and threatenings from the lowest to the highest, at the attributes of the Son of God, at the censures, praises, counsels, threatenings, promises, at the general principles brought out in hints, at the character of God, at the prospects of men, at the doctrines and duties, at the historical events, at the predictions and lessons of instructions;—all these are presented to us by the same language and in the compass of a very few verses. The comprehensiveness of the passage is indeed wonderful.

### 13. A CENTRAL POINT IN EACH MESSAGE.

We now come to another important feature of the messages. In each of them there is a central point around which everything else is arrayed, upon which everything else has a bearing, and

which gives color and shape to all else. There was a well-defined and peculiar message to each church. There was some one thing intended to be communicated to each, which pertained to something special in it, and which could not have been addressed to any other. There was some evil to be corrected, some virtue to be acknowledged, or some information to be imparted, which formed the substance of each communication. In each case there was something definite and paramount to everything else. Every point has an exact purpose, and receives its special character from the great central thought of the message. The titles applied to our Lord, the censures, the approvals, the counsels, the threatenings, the promises, are all moulded according to the character of the particular church which has called forth the message from its great Head.

It is instructive, and makes the whole matter more distinct, to place these central points of the various messages together, so that they can be compared, their shades of meaning be analyzed, and their full significance be comprehended. Accordingly, the central definite messages to the various churches are—to Ephesus, "Thou hast left thy first love;" to Smyrna, "I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty;" to Pergamos, "Thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam," or tolerating evil; to Thyatira, "Thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants," or yielding to evil; to Sardis, "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead;" to Philadelphia, "Behold, I have set before thee an open door;" and to Laodicea, "Thou art neither cold nor hot."

This central point is eminently the message of God to the particular church. It conveyed to the church that special thing which caused the message to be sent. With this key there need not be much difficulty in interpreting the mind of God to that particular church.

# CHAPTER V.

## THE STAR-ANGELS.

### 1. SUBJECT OF THE CHAPTER.

At the very beginning of our study of the seven messages to the churches we meet with two terms which occupy a conspicuous place throughout the whole passage. They are the two words *stars* and *angels*. We find, moreover, that they are applied to the same object, whatever that object is. They are important, inasmuch as they are the chief object addressed, from first to last. In the first chapter they have the pre-eminence of denoting something which was in the right hand of the Son of God. They stand first in each of the seven messages. That which they designate has the solemn position of being responsible for the condition of the churches. Who or what were they?

The very word *angel*, "messenger"—messenger from heaven, as it is used here—gives us a glimpse into the constitution of the Church in that early age, and as it was undoubtedly intended to be in all ages afterward. If we could ascertain with certainty what office or offices the word means, we would have so much positive authority for that feature in the organization of the Church. As a matter of fact, this use has been made of it by more than one branch of the Church, and hence it becomes important that we understand the ground on which we rest.

Words are not inconsiderately used in these important communications to the people of God. They are significant. "Every word, if rightly viewed, effects a special purpose." Perhaps nowhere in the Bible are words used with so much discrimination as here; for often the whole import of a passage is dependent on an emblem, on a word, or on the arrangement of words. Every syllable was selected by the divine Revealer for the instruction and guidance of the Church in all her earthly career. The merest glance will convince us that here, in this word *angel* and in others, there are involved questions of great practical importance for the Church of God as now in its militant state. The Church as light-bearer in the world, the stars or lights in the right hand of Christ, the

messages sent from heaven, the angels or representatives of the Church as commissioned from on high, the authority that rules in the kingdom of Christ on earth,—all these things, which are of unspeakable importance, are touched by the inspired pen as either named or implied, and all more or less directly connected with the word *angel*.

### 2. PRINCIPLES GUIDING OUR INVESTIGATION.

In our investigation of this point, on which so many diverse opinions have been advanced and which is of so much practical importance, we must be guided by some fixed principle or rule. If we apply the right key, if we follow the right rule, we must ultimately reach the mind of the Spirit.

Our one simple rule must be to let the passage speak for itself and be its own interpreter. Unlike most passages, we can find no aid in the investigation by reference to other scriptures, for in no other place in the Bible is there any reference to angels as an order or class of ministers. The only place where there is anything like it is in Malachi 2:7, and there obviously the reference is to the class collectively. Neither can we rely on imagined likeness in the words *stars* and *angels* to something else, for fancy is boundless in its vagaries. Moreover, the opinions of eminent students of the Bible will not give us much satisfaction, for the writings of prominent interpreters can be quoted for every view that has been advanced on this subject.

### 3. VIEWS OF OTHERS TO BE STUDIED.

The simple question before us is, To what does the term *angel* refer? What office or offices or feature of the kingdom of Christ does it denote? It is much more difficult to reach a satisfactory answer to this question than might at first be anticipated. In a point which the enthroned King makes so prominent, it is well to study what has been taught by the wise, the learned, and the devout. The chief opinions which have been held concerning it are worthy of being considered in detail. We shall thereby reach a more comprehensive knowledge of the whole subject. We shall see that it has been very carefully studied out by the best of minds, and its various aspects fully explained. Theories which have been advanced and supported by some of the most judicious of commentators, as they are certainly entitled to careful consideration, cannot be thoroughly investigated without profit.

4. VARIOUS THEORIES.

On this subject of the meaning and reference of the term *angels* in this passage there are seven prominent theories other than the one we have adopted, each of them supported by eminent students of the Bible. We will state each of these theories as distinctly and as fairly as in our power.

(1) The angels are *apostles*, inspired, possessed of the gift of tongues, and capable of working miracles, the successors of the apostles of our Lord in every sense. This was the doctrine of Edward Irving and his followers.

(2) The angels were the *genius of the Church*, its animus, the personified character or spirit of the Church. This is the view of Farrar, Lange, DeWette, and others.

(3) The angels were *celestial angels* in some way connected with the churches. They were angels *literally*. Among the advocates of this opinion were Origen, Jerome, and Alford.

(4) The angels were *deputies*, one of whom was sent from each of the seven churches to carry their salutations, their sympathy, and their gifts to John, a prisoner in Patmos. In addition to Ebrard and others, the chief advocate of this view is the Rev. Dr. W. D. Killen.

(5) The angels were officers in the church corresponding to the *readers* or *heralds* in the synagogue. This was the theory of Vitringa, Lightfoot, Bengel, Adam Clarke, and others.

(6) The angels were *moderators*, or temporary presiding officers of the Presbytery, who were the proper representatives of the Church. This view was advocated by Dr. Cummings, Hengstenberg, and other eminent students of the Bible.

(7) The angels were the diocesan or permanent *bishops of the churches*. This is the view advocated by most Episcopal writers, such as Trench and Plumptre.

The great names connected with these theories and the plausible appearance of some of them are such that they deserve to be fairly weighed. We will consider each of them in succession.

(1) *Real Apostles.*—Like the twelve apostles, they were inspired, and possessed the gift of tongues and the power of working miracles. This was the doctrine of that splendid but erratic genius Rev. Edward Irving and those who affiliated with him. The theory is so wild, so contrary to the facts of experience, and so generally repudiated by the soundest of biblical scholars that we need not dwell upon it.

(2) *Genius of the Church.*—The angels were the personified character, spirit, or genius of the Church. This opinion seems plausible, and it is supported by names that give it great weight. It explains many of the allusions in the messages; and it is a not unusual thing in Scripture for the word *angel* to be applied to abstract ideas or objects. Moreover, it is perfectly consistent to regard the angel as the spirit, the character, the very essence of the Church.

But there are insuperable objections to the theory. (*a*) It cannot be that the angels are the spirit or genius of the Church, one with it, because all through the messages the *angels* and the *churches* are distinguished from each other. Everywhere it is "The angel of the church." The Son of man was in the midst of the seven candlesticks or churches, and he held in his right hand the seven stars or angels. The angel is one thing, the church another. They are not identical, as this theory would make them. (*b*) The peculiar language of the messages forbids this opinion. It could not be said with proper sense that the animus or genius of a church was in the hand of the Son of man. (*c*) The genius of the Church is not real enough, not substantial enough, to meet the objects that are here praised or blamed, censured or warned. (*d*) The addresses are not made to an animus or to a character, but to rational objects. (*e*) Such promises would not be made to a character or to the spirit of a church as: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." The mere naming of these several objections shows that this theory is untenable.

(3) *Real, Celestial Angels.*—The angels of the churches were real, celestial angels. This theory has been advocated by many able commentators, and it is not to be rejected without good reasons. Origen and Jerome among the ancients and Alford among modern biblical scholars held this opinion. This usage of the word *angel* is sanctioned by other parts of Scripture, as in the words of our Lord concerning the little ones of his kingdom: "Their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." And the theory most admirably meets many of the teachings and counsels of the messages.

On the other hand, however, many things in the whole passage are of such a nature as to render the interpretation inadmissible. (*a*) The explanation of the Son of man in the last verse of the previous chapter forbids it. There the golden candlesticks are interpreted as meaning the churches—the churches as something *seen, human, earthly;* analogy requires that the stars be of the same

nature, hence they must be interpreted by something *known*, *human*, *earthly*. That literal or celestial angels would not do. (*b*) The entire use of the word *angel* in the passage looks like something well known and familiar to the churches, which celestial angels certainly would not be. (*c*) The charges of evil, of usury, of sin, brought against the angels of some of the churches make it impossible that they could be pure, heavenly angels. "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love" —could not be charged against a sinless angel. (*d*) The prediction could not be uttered to a celestial angel: "The devil shall cast some of you into prison;" or, "I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee." This theory, then, must also fall when tested by the messages in detail.

(4) *Deputies from the Churches.*—The angels were deputies or messengers sent from the seven churches—one from each—to bear their sympathy, their consolations, and their gifts to John the prisoner in his affliction, and to minister to him in his feeble old age. The name of Rev. Wm. D. Killen, so careful, so learned, and so judicious, is calculated to give weight to this opinion. It is also fortified by the strong probability of the case arising from the veneration in which the aged apostle must have been held and the affection which the churches must have cherished toward him.

But here again the investigation of the messages in detail reveals difficulties which seem to be insuperable. (*a*) John would not be commanded to write to the angels or messengers when, according to this theory, they were visiting him in person, and could therefore receive the words from his lips; for we must bear in mind that the messages were *sent* to the angels. (*b*) There is not one word in the entire passage to support this view. (*c*) Such a person as a mere deputy or messenger would not come up to the dignity of those who were specially in the right hand of the Son of man, and who are charged as responsible for the character of the churches. (*d*) Considering the toil, the expense, and the danger of the times, it is extremely improbable that there would be so many persons as seven sent as a deputation to the apostle when one or two from the body of the churches, which were not far apart, would have done just as well. We are thus forced to give up this theory also.

(5) *An Office borrowed from the Synagogue.*—The angels in the churches were men who held an office bearing that name borrowed from the Jewish synagogue. It corresponded with that of reader

or clerk in the synagogue—an officer who also had charge of the sacred rolls and other holy things. This theory is rendered plausible from the great probability that such office, in substance, would be transferred to the Christian Church, and from the fact that other offices were undoubtedly so transferred. Moreover, it is supported by the names of some biblical scholars who are of the very first authority, such as Vitringa, Lightfoot, and Bengel.

But the objections to it seem to be fatal. (*a*) There is not elsewhere a word or hint or allusion to lead to the belief that such office had been transferred from the Jewish to the Christian Church. (*b*) There is nothing to sustain the opinion but the supposed probability of the case and the similarity of the name. (*c*) The decisive objection, however, is that the synagogue officer was one of an inferior character, being a mere reader, clerk, or messenger whose business it was to perform the errands of the sanctuary, whereas the *angel* in the messages is evidently the head of the church, and as such responsible for its character and condition. This theory must therefore be abandoned, inasmuch as it fails to meet this point so evidently implied in the messages.

(6) *Moderators of Presbyteries.*—The angels were moderators of presbyteries, or temporary presiding officers over the collective bodies of churches in the various cities. It is more than probable that in some of the cities at least there were several churches, and in conducting the religious interests of the community it would become necessary to have a presiding officer for the time being. But such officer would be nothing more nor less than the moderator as of one of our presbyteries. Then in any communication to the Christian people of that community he would be the natural representative to be addressed, and hence be called the angel, or God's messenger there. This theory was advocated by Dr. John Cummings and by many other writers of other denominations as well as Presbyterians.

But the obvious and decisive objection to it is that, excepting its fulfilling most of the requisites of the messages, it is not supported by one hint or word in the whole passage. It depends solely upon its supposed fitness to explain the word. Nowhere else in the whole passage have we any information about the existence of such an officer. There is nothing in the message to support it, and therefore we must give up the theory as untenable.

(7) *Diocesan Bishops.*—The angels were diocesan bishops in the various cities. In each of the cities, with the surrounding country, were several churches, and, according to the theory, it had become

necessary in all their ecclesiastical affairs to have a permanent presiding bishop or pastor. Originally the bishop and presbyter or elder held precisely the same office, but as the churches increased in number one of the presbyters had been elevated to a permanent presidency. This change had been made gradually, and under apostolic sanction, inasmuch as the apostle John was still living. This permanent or diocesan bishop, according to the usage of the times, was called the "bishop of the church," and to him, as a matter of course, the messages from Heaven were addressed. Moreover, the fact that these special addresses were sent to him from the great Head of the Church established still more firmly the doctrine of the episcopate as it now exists in all Episcopal churches. The angel of the church, therefore, was its diocesan bishop, and the messages were of course addressed to him; and every point in the whole passage is met by this explanation.

This is, we think, a fair statement of this theory which is so extensively adopted. This is the theory; but will it explain all the facts, statements, and teachings of the messages? It must be subjected to that test, for we cannot rely simply upon its supposed fitness to interpret the word *angel*. It is the theory discussed or more generally assumed by most Episcopalian writers, and is sustained by such authorities as Trench, Plumptre, Canon Cook, and many others. Because it is supported by such honored names, and by so many of them, it demands more consideration than any of the preceding theories.

We would therefore present very briefly the substance of the objections which seem to us to be absolutely fatal to it.

(*a*) This theory is advocated by most Episcopal writers, but not by them all; for such eminent scholars as Farrar and Lightfoot, with many others, held different views.

(*b*) There is not one word in all the seven messages, not one hint, not one allusion, to the existence of any such office as that of diocesan bishops or permanent presidents of the various churches.

(*c*) It could hardly be that in so short a time as since the age of the apostles—so short a time as since Paul said to the elders of the church of Ephesus, "Take heed . . . . to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers" (or bishops), when evidently the office of elder and that of bishop were the same—until the writing of these messages (a period of only thirty years) so great a change could have occurred as the establishment

of a new order in the ministry—and that because of a gradually recognized want in the churches.

(*d*) The angel could not have been the *one bishop* in each church, since in the messages the angel is sometimes addressed in the singular and sometimes in the plural. Whatever the reference was, the word used must have been a collective term. We find such expressions addressed to the angels as: "Shall cast *some of you* into prison," and, "I will give unto *every one of you* according to your works." This plural form could not be used unless the term *angel* were a collective one. In the fifty-one verses of the two chapters there are at least eleven instances where the angel is addressed in the plural, which could not be if the term meant one bishop. We might conceive of the angel being addressed in the plural as representative of the body of the people, but this could hardly be in so many places and different connections. Then, in another view it was impossible. The angel is sometimes spoken to as one and sometimes as more than one *in the same address* to a single church. This precludes the supposition. In the single message to the church in Thyatira we have first the singular: "I know *thy* works, and charity," and then the plural: "But that which *ye* have already, hold fast till I come." If the plural were always used, then it might be that angel or bishop could be taken as the representative of the people. When, however, in the very same address to Smyrna we have at one time the singular σου and at another the plural ὑμῶν, then we know positively that the word *angel* is a collective term in all the messages. Hence it cannot be a sole, permanent bishop, but something that can be addressed as either singular or plural. This point well considered must be fatal to the theory.

(*e*) As a matter of fact, it is very plain that the term does not denote a person at all, but an office, or the collective body holding the office. This we gather from the repeated summons, "Let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches." Hence it is not an individual that is addressed, but a body of individuals.

(*f*) We have no evidence whatever that there were several congregations in some of the cities or in any of them, and if not, there could not, of course, be diocesan bishops, whose office it is to preside over one church. The eminent commentator Rev. Thomas Scott, himself an Episcopalian, declares, "There is nothing said about different congregations, either in the cities or about them, though elders are named; hence there cannot be any reference to bishops."

(*g*) It could hardly be that there was more than one congregation

in some of the cities, as, for instance, in Thyatira or Philadelphia, and yet the theory requires that there should be. A diocesan bishop over no more than one congregation! The very supposition upsets the theory.

(*h*) It is little less than ludicrous to suppose, as the theory does, that there were *seven* bishops with *seven* dioceses in so small a territory as that in which the seven cities were located. If each one of these seven cities had its diocese, then surely some of the other cities not named, such as Magnesia, Metropolis, and Miletus, must have had one also. Then there must have been ten or twelve bishops in a space of country not so large as West Virginia. This supposition, which necessarily flows from the theory, perfectly upsets it.

From all this, most certainly it cannot be that the angels corresponded with what are called diocesan bishops.

### 5. THE TRUE THEORY.

We have now passed in review these seven theories, and have seen that to each of them there are fatal objections. It cannot be that the term *angel* is explained by any one of them. To what, then, does the term *angel* refer? This is the question before us, and we get answers to it from *three* separate lines of investigation. The three processes are—exegesis of the passage in its various words and connections, and their bearing on the interpretation; a careful analysis of the passage, and an exhibition of the way in which it contains every element of the proposed theory; a detailed statement of the facts which corroborate this interpretation, harmonize every element of it, and bring out the wealth of its instruction.

#### *First Process.*

*An examination of the passage in its various words, phrases, and connections, and the interpretations to which this leads.* What does the whole passage teach as to the term *angel*, as we may gather from its most obvious meaning, without any mere conjectures and without reference to other scriptures?

In the first chapter, verses 12 and 16, we have two symbols, *seven golden candlesticks* and *seven stars*, which are plainly connected and related to each other. In the 20th verse of the same chapter the Son of man himself explains these two symbols as so connected: "The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven candlesticks are the seven churches." Now, as to the candlesticks there is no difficulty. They signified the seven churches. This cannot be mistaken. But "the seven stars are the angels

of the seven churches"—here is the question which perplexes. To what did the Son of man refer by "the angels"? Of course, analogy at once leads to the assurance that, as the candlesticks were explained by something well known, something familiar and earthly, so also must *stars* be explained by something familiar and human. The second symbol is explained by the earthly, the human thing, the Church; then the first symbol, the *stars*, must be explained by some earthly and well-known thing. Obviously, the symbol *stars* will not be explained by some other symbol, such as *angels*—if angels, as found here, were a mere symbol. That would not be an explanation, nor would it be analogous, as it clearly should be, to the other explanation. Consequently, *angel* here cannot be used as another symbol—as any symbol at all. It must be something human, definite, well known. It must be related to the Church, as the whole connection shows. It must be human and familiar. It must have been something well understood at the time, just as the term "churches" was.

Now, these conditions were fulfilled in the ministry of the Church as in nothing else. Plainly, the angels were the ministry sent down from the great Head of the Church. Moreover, as in the divine explanation of the seven golden candlesticks the Church is taken in a comprehensive sense, so also must the angels be taken in a comprehensive sense, without designating their special nature and rank. *The angel of any church, then, denoted its ministry in its whole comprehensive character.*

But the analogy leads us to another important element in the explanation. The ministry is first symbolized by the emblem *stars*, and the precise signification of stars—especially in connection with candlesticks—is that of lights. This symbol therefore tells of the ministry as lights in the Church. But the Church is the *kingdom of Christ* as well as the light-bearer in the world. Then, as a kingdom implies government, authority, officers, the angels must mean the authority in the Church, taking authority in its comprehensive form. As the ministry are "stars" in the Church, they are lights or light-bearers; as they are "angels" sent and commissioned from the great Head, they are the spiritual authority in the Church. All the messages corroborate this very fully.

From the exegetical study of the passage, then, the general deduction is manifest—namely, that the angels, as the term is used here, are *the spiritual authority of the Church in the aggregate.* The candlesticks are the churches, and the stars are the angels or spiritual authority, without stating its specific nature. Then, being

the commissioned authority, the angels are the natural recipients of these messages, or of any other communications from the throne of God. They were simply the government of the respective churches, to whom the messages would naturally be addressed, without any hint whatever as to whether a single person, a bench of elders, a moderator of presbytery, a diocesan bishop, or some other body was invested therewith;—that question must be decided from other evidence.

We are confident this is the true theory; but as on the other opinions we have demanded the strongest evidence, so here we should have a "Thus saith the Lord." According to the symbolism of Scripture, the office is transferred from the heavenly to the earthly ministry of God: for this reason the ministry is termed the *angel* of the Church. This thought was rightly expressed by Jonathan Edwards: "As one mystical person, the ministry is called the angel of the Church." By another, "The pastors, because of the unity and sameness of their work, are sometimes spoken of as one; but sometimes as more than one, because they are the mouth of the people." Moreover, the specific nature of their office is wisely withheld. The stars are the ministry as lights merely, without designating how they are to be employed or how they are to let their light shine; the angels are the ministry denoting their authority—the authority of the Church, in whomsoever it is invested. The essential idea of angel is that of being sent or commissioned from the heavenly Head of the Church, in his place and by his authority. This theory is highly satisfactory, both from the nature of the words and from their relation to each other; and we must remember that words here are used with perfect discrimination. There could not be anything indefinite in words which express messages from Heaven—in words every syllable of which is designed by Infinite Wisdom to influence the destiny of the world.

*Stars as Lights. Angels as Spiritual Authority.*

In order to make this interpretation as plain as in our power, we will repeat its substance in a form somewhat different. When we say that the term *angel* as used here means the spiritual authority of the Church in a comprehensive form, we express a fact that will explain every point in the whole passage. The Son of man interprets the stars and the angels as being the same. Why then are the two titles used? Why does the unerring Interpreter use the two, and explain the one by the other?

The ministry is set forth by two titles—one a symbol, and the other an object well known to those early churches. They are the same thing, and the two terms must refer to two functions of the office, and both of them must be connected with the churches. The term *stars* refers to the function of the ministry as lights or teachers. They are called *angels* as expressing the spiritual authority they have received from Christ. The Church is a light-bearer, and as such her ministers are stars. The Church is also a kingdom —the kingdom of Christ, having the authority of her divine Head, exercised or administered under his commission. In this respect her ministry are angels, or the commissioned or sent of Christ. *As the Church holds up the light of Christ to the world, her ministry are stars; as she is a kingdom, they are angels.*

Then, as the term *stars* is used without designating how the light is to be emitted, so angels are the ministry, denoting the authority of the Church, in whomsoever it may be invested. The word *angel*, then, is a general term; neither in the vision nor in any other part of Scripture is there a single hint or allusion to the particular kind of church office that is intended. The essential idea it contains is that of being sent or of being commissioned from the divine Head of the Church, in his place and by his authority.

Thus the study of this whole passage, we believe, fully establishes this theory. This view of the term *angel* as found in the messages meets every difficulty, explains every point, and carries with it a flood of light concerning the Church of God as she is now established.

*Second Process.*

We now enter upon the second process of our investigation. This consists of analyzing the passage throughout, and ascertaining whether it contains all the various elements of the interpretation which we have already reached by explaining the terms in their various connections. Our investigation will consist of several distinct steps, and every step we shall find terminating in the same satisfactory resting-place.

*First Step.—The angels are ministers of God.* On this all are agreed, though, as a matter of fact, it is the only point in all the messages which is not here distinctly brought out. A very high authority explains: "The term *angel* in the proper signification of the word does not import the nature of any being, *but only an office*, in which seven angels are called the ministers of God and ministering spirits." On this point there can be no diversity of opinion. Angels are ministers—are the ministry.

*Second Step.*—Angels are the ministry *in the Church.* This fact is obvious from the connection of the stars with the candlesticks—the angels with the churches. They are placed together in both the 16th and 20th verses of the first chapter. They are inseparable. There is a vital connection between them.

*Third Step.*—The angels are the ministry in the Church *as a human or earthly thing.* They are not here a part of the Church triumphant. They are not celestial angels. This assurance clearly results from Christ's explanation: "The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches." The candlesticks were the churches as a human or earthly thing. By analogy, the angels also must have been something human, earthly, visible, familiar.

*Fourth Step.*—The angels are the ministers of the Church on earth, *by divine appointment.* The stars in this respect were in the right hand of the Son of man, dear to him, protected by him, and in every way at his command. The very word *angel* carries with it the idea of being appointed and sent by him. The essential thing concerning them here is that they were sent by God, that he appointed them, and that they are his representatives.

*Fifth Step.*—The angels as earthly ministers in the churches, appointed of God, *are clothed with spiritual authority*—the authority of the Church. The Church is a kingdom, and therefore must have officers and authority lodged somewhere. Here is that authority. Throughout the whole of the messages the angels are spoken of as responsible for the admission and retention or exclusion of members from the churches. They are responsible for the character of the churches. As those in authority, they are either praised or blamed according as one or the other is merited. All these messages are addressed to them as the authorities representing the various churches. It is therefore plain that the spiritual authority and power of the churches were lodged in these angels.

*Sixth Step.*—The angels as the earthly ministry of the churches, appointed of God and clothed with spiritual authority, *are here set forth in a collective form.* They are the spiritual authority personified. They are the spiritual rule in a comprehensive aspect, so as to be addressed as either one or several, as may be most convenient. The angel is the spiritual authority of the Church as such, without any intimation of the persons or class of persons by whom it is to be exercised. According to the fundamental idea of angel, it is an office rather than an officer. Sometimes it is spoken of as singular and sometimes as plural in the same address. In the very same

address it is sometimes spoken to as the angel and sometimes as the Church. For instance, in the same address we have: "Unto the angel of the church in Sardis write," and, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches," showing unmistakably that the word does not refer to an individual, but that it is a collective or comprehensive term. The angel denotes the body of elders. *The several elders of the church are represented as one mystical person, and all are called "the angel in the church."*

We have thus followed closely the inductive process, and have found from the facts or teachings of the passage that the angels are the *ministry*—the ministry *in the Church*—the ministry in the Church *as an earthly thing*—the ministry in the Church as an earthly thing, *appointed of God*—the ministry in the Church as a human thing, appointed of God and *clothed with spiritual authority*—the ministry in the Church as a human thing, appointed of God, clothed with spiritual authority, *and taken in a collective form.* Each step is distinct, clear, positive, and connected with all the rest. Nothing is taken for granted or merely assumed because probable. All put together make the meaning of the term *angel* as used here perfectly clear and satisfactory. *It is a collective term denoting the spiritual authority of the Church, in whomsoever that authority may be lodged* —authority which entails responsibility, which is directly from the great Head of the Church, which is lodged in human hands, which is connected most intimately with all the great interests of the Church, and which constitutes the Christian ministry. In brief, *the angels are the spiritual authority in the Church, in whosesoever hands it may be lodged.*

All the six points we have named are contained in this explanation. All of them must be met in any explanation that will satisfy us. Single points of the messages are explained in each of the other theories which have been presented. Some of the theories contain several of these essential elements of the true explanation. But when we find that all these six points are fully satisfied by the theory, that they all harmonize in it, that it requires no straining of the thought, no mere conjecture, in order to remove difficulties, then we cannot hesitate for a moment as to this being the true interpretation.

### *Third Process.*

There is a third process, by which our confidence in this theory becomes, if possible, still more firmly established. In this third process we shall of course find many points that are similar to

those we have already presented, but they come to us in a different form and in different connections. It assumes the interpretation of the term *angel* as the spiritual authority of the Church, and traces the manner in which that view is corroborated throughout the messages.

(*a*) The angels being the responsible spiritual authority in the churches, it becomes manifest why the various messages were addressed to them.

(*b*) *Angel* being a collective term denoting this church authority, we understand why the angels are addressed sometimes in the singular and sometimes in the plural form.

(*c*) Angels being the collective human head, and so being responsible, there is no difficulty in comprehending why they are praised or blamed for the respective characters of the various churches.

(*d*) Inasmuch as they bear the title *angel*, meaning *sent* or *commissioned* from heaven, we are instructed that spiritual authority in the Church is real, abiding, heavenly in its origin, neither to be taken up nor to be set aside by mere human whim or fancy or conjecture.

(*e*) This explanation in the messages from God harmonizes with the teaching of our Lord in the days of his flesh, when, in commissioning his disciples, he said, "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

(*f*) This view of the term *angel* makes intelligible the explanation of the Son of man in verse 20 of the first chapter, for the angels are the recognized, the well-known thing, the spiritual authority needed in every church.

(*g*) The general term *angel* was selected in divine wisdom so as neither to exclude nor to include (as alone sanctioned) any particular class in the ministry. All that is essential here is *sent*—sent of God.

(*h*) Angels, which are the stars, are the ministry of the Church, and they are in the right hand of the Son of man. Hence the ministry is from Christ, appointed by him and dear to him; they are cherished by him, and not only their authority, but their safety also, is very precious in his sight.

(*i*) Finally, this interpretation is absolutely necessary in order to give any meaning to one point in the passage. In ch. 1:16 we read: "And he had in his right hand seven stars." Now let us take the most current one of all the other theories—the theory

that the angels meant the diocesan bishops—and ask, What does this mean? He had in his right hand seven stars—angels—diocesan bishops. Were only the diocesan bishops in his hand? What then are we to do with the rest of the ministry? Has the great Head of the Church special care over only the bishops? Far from us is the purpose of turning a theory so venerable into ridicule, but surely this aspect of the matter must have been overlooked by the advocates of this theory.

### 6. SUM OF THE WHOLE ARGUMENT.

We gather, then, from the whole passage concerning this much-disputed and very important word that *stars* or *angels* is a collective term denoting the spiritual authority in the Church, committed to the people of God for the welfare of his cause, and that it has been sent from heaven and lodged in the hands of Christ's ministers, and exercised by them as one body. This does not leave out a single element of the teaching of the passage concerning it; it meets and explains every point; it harmonizes with every affirmation; it covers the whole subject, and that without straining any point in the interpretation or relying on any mere conjecture.

There may be other good reasons for the use of the word *angels* in designating the spiritual authority that is committed to the ministry, but these will suffice to show that no other word would be so appropriate, and that the selection of this one was in nothing less than divine wisdom. Of all possible designations, it is the wisest, the most expressive, and the best.

To gather all into one view: When, in studying the message, we reach the conclusion that the *star-angels* denote the spiritual authority committed to the ministry by the great Head of the Church, then we are enabled to see clearly how the angels could be praised or blamed in the various messages; how they could be addressed sometimes as one and sometimes as more than one; how this name could be applied to them as those clothed with authority from the great Head of the Church; how the stars could be explained as the angels, or human ministers of God to his people; how the same officers could be spoken of as *stars* when the Church is regarded as the light-bearer, and as *angels* when she is looked upon as a kingdom; how, by the use of such a comprehensive term, provision is made for embracing either a Congregational pastor, a Presbyterian moderator, or an Episcopalian bishop; how every church is addressed in these messages—whether a single con-

gregation or a body of them together; how Christ's appointment, when he gave the keys to his disciples, was not abrogated, but rather confirmed; how church government or authority is real, is from God, and is abiding from generation to generation; how the ministry is an honored, responsible, divine, and glorious calling; how ministers, because commissioned from on high, should be holy in life, and held in honor for their work's sake; and how the ministry, though vilified by infidelity of every name and degree, is perfectly safe in the hand of the Son of God.

### 7. DIGNITY OF THE MINISTERIAL OFFICE.

No man can engage in the earnest study of this subject without rising to a more exalted impression of the dignity and responsibility of the ministerial office. As we investigate the import of the terms *stars* and *angels* we learn to look upon the office in a very solemn light. If our attention to this point shall serve no other purpose than to exalt the office in our esteem, it will not have been in vain.

How can any language exaggerate the honor of those who are called stars by the divine Head of the Church? What human dignity will compare with that of those whom God terms the angels in the churches? They are placed here in the forefront of the grand objects of the revelation. They are the recipients of these wonderful communications. In a connection which embraces things that are vital and grand in the Church they hold the first place. As the ministry of God, this office is not a humanly-devised institution. It was appointed of Heaven. It was as directly from God as was the Church herself. The position of the ministry is therefore stable and safe. How could this stability and this dignity be more expressively asserted from the divine throne than in the declaration that the stars or angels or ministers are in the right hand of the glorified Son of man?

If such be the dignity of the ministerial office, must not its responsibility be correspondingly great? If holiness can be found on earth, surely it ought to be found in those who have been exalted so highly and called to such a sacred work. In him who is an angel in the Church of God, his holiness is his honor, his power, his glory. Unholiness in a minister is apostasy to his God—it is a shocking crime. He cannot be unholy alone. Preeminently is it true of him that if he goes downward in guilt he draws others after him. He who enters the ministry or who continues in that exalted calling without a correspondingly high appre-

ciation of its sacredness commits a great error: he stands in great danger. There is no man who, if true to his Master and true to his calling, may rise so high and shine so brightly in the firmament of glory eternal; but there is none who, if selfish and sinful, will sink so low and be so deeply despised by both God and man.

In the ministry nothing—neither friends nor talents nor influence nor wealth nor position nor learning nor anything else—will make up for the want of holiness. If this be wanting, all is wanting. If the minister be a holy man, nothing can long prevent him from becoming a useful and an honored man. If he be not righteous, it will in the end be seen, and his whole life and work and influence will be blighted and be a blight. Above all things, then, should the minister seek to be holy. He should covet the honor which attaches to his high calling, but it should be through a life of holiness.

If such be the high calling of the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, and such the urgent motives for them to be holy in heart and life, their messages ought to be listened to with deference, and they should receive that honor which is their due. Christian men should honor them, so that they may be the more successful in the holy work to which they have been appointed. Although they be not beloved for their own sake, yet surely, for the sake of Him whose commission they bear, they should be looked to and spoken of as loved and honored. On the other hand, what a reckless and dangerous thing to treat the ambassadors of Christ with ridicule and despite! It is true that sometimes there are those of them who prove unworthy in life and base in character, and thereby incur enormous guilt; but is it not also guilt and treason to magnify their sins, and in so doing to wound our Lord, who tolerated even a Judas? To make war on them is to make war on Him who sent them. To dishonor them is to dishonor him. For the Master's sake therefore—the divine Master, of whom they are the ambassadors—the ministry should be held in high esteem.

This dignity of the ministerial office imposes a very grave responsibility upon the ecclesiastical bodies by which men are inducted into it. Upon no mortals is a more solemn obligation laid. Every new man who is ordained into that office is to take an essential part in giving character to the Church. His influence is to bring honor or dishonor to the cause of Christ.

There is nothing over which the Church should be more sensitive than over the character of her ministry, nothing for which she should pray more fervently or watch more affectionately. She

needs to awake to a more lively interest in her ministry. Increase the degree of respect for them, based on their increasing spirituality and devotedness and power in their work, and then without a question will Zion prosper in every element of her enterprise. The Church's whole tone, character, safety, honor, and usefulness are bound up with those of her ministry. The preaching, the soundness in faith, the tone of piety, the example, the public sentiment, the activity in good works, the power of religion in the world,—all largely depend on the ministry. Will not ministers themselves, ecclesiastical bodies, churches, parents, praying-people, all awake to this subject on which so much depends? Will they not keep near the throne, pleading that the angels may be pure and mighty and godly, faithful to their message, and true to Him who sent them as ambassadors to their fellow-men, and who holds them as stars in his right hand?

# CHAPTER VI.

## THE BEACON ON THE SHORES.

### 1. EVERY PART OF SCRIPTURE A SPECIAL PURPOSE.

Not only has the Bible as a whole, as its one great object, to testify of Christ and his salvation, but every part of it also has its own special end in the plan of God's revelation. No part of it but has its definite aim. No book or part of a book is redundant. No fragment of the Bible can be spared, or have its place made up by some other portion. No part, moreover, is immaterial or of but little moment. No matter when or where or by whom any portion of it was written, it is always significant and definite.

This is what might be expected because of the extensive field which the teachings of the Sacred Book are intended to cover. Its mission is to make the Christian man complete in all his doctrines, works, and character. So it is asserted very positively on the inspired pages, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." It could not, then, be otherwise than that every part of Scripture should be full of specific meaning. The manifold perfections of him who is our Creator, Preserver, and Redeemer, the diversified wants of our souls, the innumerable manifestations of providence on behalf of the Church of God throughout the centuries, and the wonderful achievements of Christ in working out our deliverance from death eternal,—the revelation of all these required that every part of Scripture should be freighted with the most momentous information.

### 2. THIS END SHOULD BE DISCOVERED.

It is a matter of very great importance that we ascertain the specific end aimed at in each of the various portions of the Sacred Book. In a general way this discovery is not difficult to make. For instance, it is easy to see that the book of Genesis was given to make known the origin of man and the

commencement of sin in our world; that the laws of Moses are given in so much detail in order to manifest the purity of God and man's utter helplessness in himself; that the historical books were designed to describe the long and careful preparation of the nations for the advent of the great Deliverer; that the Psalms are the Church's book of experience, containing a portraiture of the regenerated soul under every phase of its earthly progress; that the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are a treasury of inspired practical wisdom; and that the Prophecies are the light which God has seen fit to throw over the future, so far as it was needed for the guidance and comfort of his people. This is the Old Testament; the New is still more easily understood. It is the portion of Scripture in which the Holy Ghost has conveyed to the world the knowledge of the birth, life, death, and ascension of its Redeemer, of the setting up of his kingdom among men, of the doctrines of his great salvation, and of the destiny of his Church through the nations of the world until time shall end. This is a general statement concerning the ends contemplated by the principal portions of the Scriptures, but the designs of the minor parts may be traced out just as distinctly.

There is a special purpose comtemplated by every portion of the Word of God. Hence it becomes an object of the highest moment to ascertain what that purpose is. If we have not that knowledge, it will be almost impossible to make any progress in the correct understanding of the passages. Not comprehending the end in view, it cannot be expected that we shall rightly interpret the meaning of the various passages that lead up to it. On the other hand, the great object of the given portion of the Word being distinctly before our minds, we shall then have the key by which to open every part. Many a passage that would otherwise have been inscrutable will lie perfectly plain and open before us. We shall have in our hands a thread that will lead us unerringly through every labyrinth. A definite object will lie before us in the study of the whole passage that will give method and meaning and force to every sentence. It is impossible, therefore, to over-estimate the importance of making this our first earnest search, and, having made the discovery, keeping it impressively before us. What was the design of the Spirit in this portion of the inspired Book? What end is it designed to accomplish? What defect would there be without it? What niche does it occupy?

### 3. HOW IS THE PURPOSE TO BE DISCOVERED?

How are we to discover, with any degree of certainty, what the niche is of any given portion of the Sacred Book? How is the key to be found? Generally, it is not difficult to make the discovery. There are a few rules that may guide us in searching for it: (*a*) The general scope and bearing of the whole passage will very often show clearly what great purpose it was intended to accomplish. (*b*) The convergence of the several elements of the passage in some obvious end, and their harmonizing therein, will in most cases make the object sufficiently clear. (*c*) Hints, allusions, and inferences, when carefully studied, will frequently indicate what is the bearing of the whole. (*d*) But, best of all, many times a statement or statements will be found which explicitly declare what the object is. Sometimes two or three or even all these indexes may be found, and these leave no uncertainty as to the intent of the passage. *Above all things should this key to the given portion be sought for and used at every point of the investigation. When it is surely found, so as to be understood and applied, half the work is done.*

### 4. PURPOSE OF THESE MESSAGES TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES.

We have dwelt so long on this point, and made it so emphatic, because there are few portions of Scripture where its application is so much needed as in these two chapters of the Apocalypse which contain the messages of God to the seven churches of Asia Minor. The opening of these messages and the right understanding of their contents depend upon our having the true key. The interpretation of every part of them depends upon the end for which they were given. At the same time, there is hardly any portion of the Bible as to the intention of which opinions have been so much divided. This is not to be wondered at. Their conspicuous place in the book of Revelation, their unique structure, the novelty of their imagery, and the valuable matter they contain are such as naturally to excite speculation. These diverse opinions may be ranged under two general classes: First, those which regard the whole passage as simply historical, and its chief end to be the conveying of information as to the state of the Church at that time; second, those which look upon the seven messages as chiefly prophetical, so that they foretell the different characteristics of seven consecutive periods of the Church's history as they would be developed through the ages. These two, more or less sharply defined, and

more or less modified by running into each other or by other views, are the leading theories.

It does not come under our plan to enter into the discussion of these, or of any, disputed points. In no sense and to no degree is our work intended to be controversial. We give the mind of the Spirit as it appears to us, and leave it to be confirmed by the harmony it gives to all the elements of the passage and by its conformity to the whole teaching of the inspired pages.

Under these various cautions would we therefore announce our belief that *these messages to the seven churches of Asia were intended as a beacon for the warning and guidance of the people of God in all subsequent ages.* This was the object, not exclusively, but chiefly, while other subordinate ends were also accomplished. In that first short period of time, while all was fresh, and in that favorable location, the experiment was made of the effect of the gospel on the Gentile world, and that, among other purposes, as a guide for the Church until the end of the world. The experiment was purposely made, and made under the special direction of Providence, so that ever afterward the Christian world might know what to expect, what to avoid, what to seek after, and what to do. It was made under divine direction and put on record by the divine Spirit, and that in a most conspicuous place, in order that there might be a reliable light on which every believing eye could look as the ages rolled away.

In all the gospel's subsequent vicissitudes this experiment made at the first, and made under the very best circumstances for the purpose, would serve to warn, to animate, and to guide all the faithful. It would be the chart to guide through the dangerous seas, and the lighthouse to cast its beams over the stormy shores of the later ages of time. To vary the imagery and to make the idea as distinct as possible, it was *setting forth at the beginning, and in a form that could be grasped, the tendencies, good and bad, which, afterward carried out, would produce the whole of the scenes depicted in the Apocalypse.* When looked at in this view it will be seen that the practical value of this portion of Scripture cannot be over-estimated. It is the New Testament book of experience in the most condensed form. In the book of Psalms we have a portraiture of the varied experience of the individual believer; in these messages we have a description of the experience of masses. In the epistles of the New Testament we have the doctrines of salvation; in these two chapters we have the doctrines carried out into practice.

### 5. HISTORICAL DESIGN.

It must first be observed that the portion of Scripture under consideration had a very important historical object. *These two chapters contain an epitome of the chief effects of the gospel's first great encounter with the Gentile world.* Up to that time the gospel had been confined mainly to the Jews, but now the barrier is leaped and the world-wide struggle with the uncircumcised nations is commenced. We have here an authentic record of how the truth as it is in Christ Jesus was received by communities to which the very idea of Jehovah was new; of how it was welcomed by some and persecuted by others; of how it upturned hoary systems of superstition and revolutionized the whole moral aspect of society; and of the effects which it produced, sometimes purifying and ennobling, and sometimes uncovering in its enemies a spirit that was diabolic. In these two compact chapters we have a description of the debased moral state in which our heavenly Deliverer found the most cultivated communities in the world, and what an amazing change he wrought among them in the short period of sixty-six years.

This information as to the state of the Church was needed as a foundation for the higher purposes of the messages. We must know what the gospel was, and what it was doing then; how the world received it, and how it affected the world. We know from the gospel what it was in the days of Christ; the body of the Apocalypse reveals what it would be in the last days; but what was it in the eventful period of its first introduction to the pagan world? This was a question we needed to have answered. At least a glimpse into the history was essential in order that we might understand the state of the Church when the great King sent down to it these messages. Who were they upon whom this great honor was conferred? What sort of people were they to whom these counsels, threatenings, and promises were sent? What influence, what celestial power, was that which had taken an immense population, whose fathers had been gross idolaters, and had so dignified them that the charge is laid on them by God himself, "He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches"?

For these and other similar reasons it is necessary that these messages should be looked upon as an inspired record of the state of the Church as it then was. In this view they form a sort of background for the magnificent panorama of revelation that is

to pass over them. This historical intent was needed first; but that was preparatory to a far higher aim.

### 6. PROPHETICAL DESIGN.

It must not be forgotten that these messages had also a prophetical mission. This was not their leading purpose, but it was a very important one. It was subordinate to the chief design, and, like the historical one, was necessary to the higher purpose. There were two great lines of instruction which were valuable then and are valuable still. We have here, first, *the tendencies which, when carried out or fully developed, would produce the vast results that are depicted on the pages of the Apocalypse;* and, second, *the rules or principles according to which God would conduct the affairs of the Church and the world until time would end.*

According to the first of these, the events themselves were prophetic. As soon as the gospel touched the masses of the heathen world, tendencies were manifested which would either prove mighty powers in the redemption of mankind, or result in utter apostasy. These first movements of the kingdom were so guided that they became great living predictions whose issues are portrayed in the rest of the book of Revelation. This is what makes these messages the appropriate opening of the Apocalypse. They are the living portraitures of tendencies, good or evil, the unfolding of which fills the rest of the book. Moreover, they also incidentally contain predictions of events that would come to pass in after-ages. For instance, we cannot look upon the sad ruins of Ephesus to-day without recalling the ominous words, "I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place;" or upon the utter desolation of Laodicea without the foreboding admonition coming back, "Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth;" or upon faithful Philadelphia, still alive, without going back to the promise, "I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out."

The other line of prophetic instruction in this portion of Scripture is still more remarkable. Almost the first impression made when we begin the study of these messages is their exact method and regularity—a regularity that extends to the most minute part as well as to the great outlines. There is no portion of Scripture that is so manifestly framed upon a beautiful and well-defined plan. This could not have been accidental. It was not without a purpose. It must indicate some great design in the mind of

God concerning the Church, *or some great feature of his methods of dealing therewith.* Nor is it very difficult to conceive with tolerable certainty what the intention must have been. *The extraordinary order, system, regularity, and the numerical and other precise rules found in these messages, must have been intended to be a type, an intimation, a prediction, a pledge, that the destiny of the Church as revealed in the rest of the Apocalypse would be conducted according to God's most exact and undeviating plan.* Of this there can scarcely be any question, and it is a point worthy of profound study. It unfolds a beauty in the conducting of God's providence over his Church that should fill our hearts with wonder and gladness. It makes the whole plan of these messages and of God's providences in the early churches a prophecy, intensely interesting and instructive, of all the after-ages. The destinies of the churches through the ages would be to no degree accidental. No unforeseen or unprovided-for events would ever shake God's projects of mercy. Dark days of persecution or of apostasy might come, but they would not lower without order or control. The exact plan was contrived in all its parts, and even the gates of hell would not prevail against it.

### 7. CHIEFLY AS A BEACON.

We now enter more fully into what we believe to be, according to the scheme of the revealed will of God, the chief object of these two chapters of the Apocalypse. We must look at this in connection with the subordinate ends which we have just mentioned. As we have shown, it was needed that we should have some knowledge of the state of the Church in those early days; it was also important that in that impressive way God should give us a prophetic picture of the manner in which he would conduct the affairs of his kingdom; and there are doubtless other deep prophetic purposes involved; but the chief value of this portion of Scripture is that *in the beginning it was intentionally set up as a beacon for the warning and guidance of all the subsequent ages of time.* These first few years of the Church's history, divinely overruled and divinely recorded, were the great "ensample" for all the coming ages. It is true that the whole of Scripture was given to us for that purpose, for we read, "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples; and they are written for our admonition, *upon whom the ends of the world are come.*" But this portion is pre-eminently our "ensample." It is made so of special design. In every respect it is suited as our warning and guide. On this point we lay very great

stress, because we believe it to be the very key to the whole of this remarkable passage of Scripture.

Christ had come down to our world, and by his life, his example, and his death had opened the way for the salvation of mankind. The Holy Ghost had descended to his Church and entered upon the blessed work of applying the purchased redemption. The Church had been organized, and religious ideas and doctrines had been defined, chiefly among the Jewish people who had been prepared therefor. Now the gospel was ready to be launched out among the nations whom it was to revolutionize and save. It was of immense importance that a beacon should be erected just then for the guidance of the Church in that most eventful career which lay before her. Such a beacon, set up then at the beginning, framed under divine guidance, in a form that would attract attention, and signaling every kind of want,—its value to the cause of Christ, throughout the vicissitudes which lay before that cause, no tongue could tell. It would be like a lighthouse keeping watch over some boundless waste of ocean where the half-hidden rocks dash up the waves raving aloft, and the darkness fills every heart with horror, and no longed-for relief dare venture out amid the tempest, and many a wail from sinking barks is lost amid the roar of the storm. Oh, for the friendly beacon there to warn other bewildered mariners to keep away from that tempestuous wilderness of wreck and foaming waters! Just such a moral beacon did God set up here, at the beginning, for the warning of his Church as she launched out over the stormy ages of time during which many a dark night would threaten, many a wild tempest spread desolation, and many an immortal soul be swept away a helpless ruin.

But we may go farther. This portion of Scripture was not only intended to warn, but it was also framed as a chart to guide amid the wild and lurking dangers of that dread ocean over which the Church must pass before her mission on earth shall be closed. This thought was finely expressed by that brilliant though eccentric genius Rev. Edward Irving: "This is my view of the Apocalypse. It was intended to be at once the chart, the pole-star, and the light of the Christian Church over the stormy waves of time until the great Pilot who walketh upon the water and stilleth the waves should again give himself to the sinking ship, and make her his abode, his ark, his glory for ever and ever." In the coming centuries of error and apostasy and persecution, of bitter enemies and faithless friends, the Church would need such

a guide. She was entering upon a wide, wild ocean, and God made this provision for her many wants on that tempestuous voyage. Here were buoys to tell of shoals unseen and dangerous, here lightships to warn of rocks that would rake away the stoutest keel, and here the majestic lighthouse sending its beams afar over the reefs where sure destruction lurked.

### 8. THE FIRST EXPERIMENT OF THE GOSPEL WITH THE PAGAN WORLD CONSTITUTED THIS BEACON.

Now this God-ordained beacon for the warning and guidance of the Church consisted of the first great experiment as to the influence of the truth as it is in Christ Jesus upon the pagan world—an experiment which extended over sixty years, and the results of which were registered in these two most instructive chapters. The gospel's first contact with the world on an extended scale formed this momentous experiment. It was providentially made in the heathen world, because henceforward not the Jewish people only, but the whole race of mankind, was to be the theatre for the development of the heavenly kingdom. The experiment could not be made among the Jews, for their existing prejudices and training would inevitably warp their minds as the gospel reached them. It could not be confined to them, because the truth from heaven was now to sweep away all national barriers and to extend to the whole human race. Besides, the day of Judaism was over for many a century to come. The other nations were now to be the actors in the grand moral movements of the world. "Since the day when the Galilean apostle John slept his last sleep under the walls of Ephesus, no son of Israel has ever exercised any widespread or lasting control over the general condition of mankind."

That experiment of sixty years among the pagan population of Asia Minor, made under the special direction of Providence and recorded with perfect truthfulness, was to be the great warning light for all the subsequent vicissitudes of the Church of God. In those sixty years there would be manifested all the important tendencies, good and bad, which would develop into such stupendous results during the centuries which were to follow. These tendencies were controlled and put on record with care that they might afterward be the guide of the people of God. They were a sample of fidelity to God and to truth, or of errors and apostasies that over and over again would be seen during the coming generations. The trial was made under the most suitable circumstances,

and the results in the sixty-three years were very different in the different churches of the seven that were selected as representatives of all. Some of them were faithful amid every kind of opposition and trial. Some of them, out of love to Christ, were ready to lay down their life in a martyr's death. Some of them had become guilty of foul apostasy. Some of them had fallen into immoral practices and such gross error as wellnigh to efface in them the glory of the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. Some of them had grown to be so lukewarm as to be positively odious in the sight of God. Some of them were wellnigh dead in heart.

The trial extended over sixty years, and most of the developments of the gospel's contact with the natural heart would be seen in that time. The variform courses of these seven would be ever recurring in other churches all the centuries through. The dangers which they encountered would be for ever rising up to meet others. God, in making his Word absolutely perfect for the guidance of his people, lets us see these first and ever-recurring trials of the truth when encountering the depraved heart, that we might be warned thereby. He set up this beacon at that early day that the Church might behold it all through the troubled centuries, and so be the more safely guided. The adorable King lifts the veil from those early movements of his kingdom and allows us to understand how they appear in his sight.

Inasmuch as this experiment was not made among prejudiced Jews nor in an indurated Christian community, we have in it a sample of the natural reception which may be expected for the gospel whenever it comes in contact with the unrenewed hearts of men. It is almost the only sample of the kind that ever was, or ever can be, obtained. In those lands there did not as yet exist any prepossession in favor of Christianity, neither had there grown up any prejudice against the cause of Christ. No currents of error had then sprung up to soil the truth as it first touched the hearts of men. They were neither gospel-hardened nor Jewish-blinded in treating the cause of Christ as they did. All was natural and spontaneous with them. Their reception of the gospel was indicative of the character of the human heart in its native depravity. In no after-age could there be such a genuine manifestation of the unchanged nature of mankind. There could not be such an exhibition of it now. Everywhere throughout the civilized world there are at the present established feelings of like or dislike to the gospel.

### 9. PROCONSULAR ASIA A SUITABLE COUNTRY FOR THAT EXPERIMENT.

There were two things which made Asia Minor the suitable place in the world, at that time, for an experiment with the gospel that would stand as a beacon throughout all generations—viz. the composition of the people, and the location of the country. As we have already seen, the population was made up of various races and classes. Composing it were cultivated Greeks from the other side of the Ægean, Orientals from the regions of the Euphrates and the Indus, Gauls who had descended from the wild hordes of the north, and Jews, who even at that day were dwellers in every land. Both Grecian and Oriental paganism had to be encountered among them. Among such a cosmopolitan people was the very place in which to make an experiment that was intended for the race. Moreover, the character of the people, as well as their composition, was admirably adapted to that purpose. Their intelligence, which would enable them to understand the new religion; their incessant efforts after a higher degree of culture; their restless activity, which would incessantly urge them forward after the untried and the startling; and their spirit of enterprise, that would perpetually lead them to grasp after all that was novel in thought or action,—all these were calculated to constitute them the very people that were fitted for an experiment that would benefit all mankind.

The location of the country was the best imaginable for the same purpose. It was in the very heart of the civilization of the nations. It could not have been better situated for sending out influences through all the more important habitations of men. Moreover, it was a centre of attraction to thousands from other lands because of its renowned institutions of learning, its celebrated shrines of heathen worship, its far-famed games, its arts, its splendid architecture, and its noted establishments for health and recreation. Its manufactured articles were used far and near throughout other lands. Merchants and other travelers thronged the great roads which traversed it in every direction. Its harbors were filled with ships which had been wafted to it over many a sea. The experiment made in such a land and among such a people would touch the springs of thousands of intelligent hearts and awaken higher impulses that would soon be felt throughout the habitations of mankind. As was intended of the gospel itself, all would be comforting and ennobling, all would be impressive, so that the true character of the religion of Christ would soon be brought out,

and the first great experiment would be wrought into a beacon that would stand for the blessing of mankind so long as the world should endure.

### 10. A SPECIAL PROVIDENCE IN PROVIDING THIS BEACON.

Everything about these messages makes it evident that there was a special providence in providing them, and the state of things which led to them, for the benefit of the people of God in all after-time. Of course there was a general providence over them, as there is over all the events of the world. But what we see beaming out here in a most impressive manner is that there was a special forthputting of providence, and that for a very special end. The same Wisdom that contrived the great pentecostal day, and endowed his servants with the gift of tongues, and bestowed upon them the power of working miracles, also arranged all the circumstances connected with these messages for the furtherance of his glorious gospel. That Wisdom reigned in the planting of the seven churches, in guiding them to the peculiar characteristics they bore, and in allowing or leading them to be what they were. By him were they established, through his apostles or through apostolic men. Not only did that providence enjoin the writing of "the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter," but it also guided to the existence of the things which were to be thus put upon record. The whole form of the history here presented leads us to believe in this special providence. The object in view was of sufficient importance to call forth such intervention of Him who doeth all things according to the counsel of his own will. Besides, in those early days, while believers walked closer with God, while the power of working miracles was yet vouchsafed, and while the apostolic functions yet lingered, such special providences were in accord with the wants of the times.

This providence was marvelously displayed by its being so ordered that in these churches we have pictures to the life of what would be found among Christians until the end of time. Every characteristic here was planned for the benefit of all readers. The good was fostered so that it might stand forth for the encouragement of the true people of God. The evil was allowed to exist and to be so prominent in order that it might warn. All, both good and bad, were overruled by the omnipotent Head of the Church, that we might see them and be prepared beforehand for similar influences that would most certainly

be encountered. It was not without an intention looking forward through many a century that Ephesus was permitted to "leave its first love," or that Philadelphia was so preserved that it could be said to her, "Thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name."

The perfection of that providence will be the better appreciated when we consider that it has to do with principles, both in the everlasting God and in our depraved hearts, that are always the same. The sinful nature of man is unaltered through all ages and in all places. The temptations to which we are exposed are essentially the same temptations which believers met with in the days of David and Solomon, and when the gospel was beginning to get a foothold among the inhabitants of Smyrna, and that are this day embarrassing our missionaries in Ningpo and Calcutta. The Son of man whose glories flash out in these first encounters of the gospel in the seven cities and the everlasting Father who directed them are "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." The workings of grace as displayed in those eventful days are the offspring of principles that must be the same evermore. Hence the wisdom of the plan which directed the first manifestations of these immutable peculiarities of both the Creator and the fallen creature, and then constituted them an enduring guide for his Church through all her militant days.

### 11. ALL FORMS OF CHURCH LIFE EXEMPLIFIED.

Our admiration of the providential structure of this beacon increases as we study the provision it makes for all possible exigencies that might arise in the experience of believers. For this purpose all forms of church life were then and there passed through and exemplified. The seven churches were used, not because they were all the churches that existed in that country, but because that number would furnish a sufficient variety. Moreover, those particular ones are chosen, and not the churches of Magnesia or Miletus or any other cities, because in these were found the requisite specimens of church experience. This point is so vital to the correct understanding of our subject that we shall cite a few most appropriate sentences from the pen of Archbishop Trench: "These seven churches of Asia are not an accidental aggregation, which might just as conveniently have been eight or six or any other number. On the contrary, there is a fitness in this number, and these seven do in some sort represent the universal Church. We have a right to contemplate the seven as offering to us the great and leading

aspects, moral and spiritual, which churches gathered out of the world in the name of Christ will assume. . . . Though not exhaustive, they give us on a small scale the grander and more recurring features of that life. They are not fragmentary, fortuitously strung together, but they have a completeness, a many-sidedness, being selected probably for that very cause. . . . These churches are more or less representative churches, and selected because they are so. They form a complex within and among themselves, mutually fulfilling and completing one another. The great Head of the Church contemplates them for the time being as symbolical of the universal Church, implying as much in the mystic seven, and giving many other indications of the same"

### 12. VARIOUS CLASSES ENCOUNTERED.

In order to perfect the first experiment, and consequently the warning signal, the gospel, even in those few years and in that limited territory, was brought into contact with all sorts and all peculiarities of people. This was the reason why the mystic number of seven cities and seven churches was used. The number would be complete, and would serve to represent the world. A glance will reveal how complete the experiment was in this respect. At Ephesus the gospel encountered the most attractive but gross idolatry. In Smyrna it came in contact with a people absorbed in commerce—with Jews and with strangers from every land. In Pergamos it met the learned and cultivated, with their schools of science and their deep philosophy. In Thyatira it came upon those who were sunken in immorality and given to all that was vile and low. In Sardis it confronted an aristocratic people, proud of their history and wedded to the world. In Philadelphia it came upon a people who were poor and weak, humble, and overlooked by the self-important cities around them. In Laodicea it faced those who were rich and haughty and fully satisfied with themselves. It will thus be seen how thoroughly the religion of Christ in those cities was tried with the world in all its leading forms, and how fully that experience was fitted to instruct believers for ever afterward.

### 13. LIFE-PICTURES.

The seven churches being selected so as to give a sufficient variety, and these particular ones because there was in each of them some special form of church experience arising from the diversified kinds and characters of people encountered, it follows

that we have the wonderful life-pictures which are contained in these two chapters of Revelation. Most carefully should we study what they are—how distinct, how striking, how well adapted to warn or guide in every conceivable state of the Church or church work or church experience. Behold what a rich and instructive variety we have in these seven specimens of what was experienced in those early formative days! In Ephesus we have the example of a church that is sadly declining from its first warm love; in Smyrna, a church that was enduring tribulation and poverty and bitter reproach for the name of Christ which it could not be forced to betray; in Pergamos, a church that was steadfast in the faith, but at the same time guilty of more than tolerating practices that were evil and destructive; in Thyatira, a church that was active in doing good, but at the same time afflicted with gross error and immorality; in Sardis, a church that was utterly dead and hypocritical, though still orthodox in its profession of the faith; in Philadelphia, a church that was small and weak, but still approved of God because of its great fidelity; in Laodicea, a church that was proud and lukewarm, and, because of that, disgusting in the sight of both God and man. When these characteristics are looked into closely, it will be seen that they cover every conceivable phase of church life, whether good or bad.

It may be objected that the portraits are so meagre, the experience so little, the characteristics so brief, that only little can be gathered from them. But let it be remembered that only germs are given—germs that under the quickening power of earnest thought will soon expand into forms of abundant luxuriance. It is with these messages to the seven churches precisely as it is with the Ten Commandments. In the Decalogue only the great principles are given, but these cover the whole subject. They have, in fact, been developed into many a grand system or code of laws. So here the essential points of either doctrine or practice, good or evil, are given, and then comes the duty of every lover of the divine Word to follow them out into their various developments. This makes these hints, allusions, and germs most valuable in their instructions.

### 14. MINUTE PHASES OF CHURCH EXPERIENCE.

A close scrutiny of the passage reveals to us not only these general features of church life, but also its various phases, to an astonishing degree of minuteness. It is marvelous how so much

could have been compressed into so few verses. Very minute and particular are the dangers and duties which are here brought to light in the form of living examples. All points and features are selected "as types of church life then existent and that would continue to exist until Christ should come again."

Let us look carefully at some of these samples of the early experience of the Church, both good and evil. Here we have love and faith and zeal declining, with all the evils attendant on that sad state; here, cold-heartedness in religion, so discouraging to men and so offensive to God; here, hateful selfishness that keeps the soul poor and unprofitable to the great cause of Christ; here, dead orthodoxy that withers up all life and energy and purity; here, a yielding to the world and to sin in little things that is sure to harden the heart and to lead farther and farther away from God; here, a tampering with idolatry and other forms of opposition to the truth that must before long contaminate the soul; here, a reckless perverting of the liberty of the gospel into licentiousness; here, deplorable instances which prove that the inevitable result of error in doctrine is soon seen in corruption of life; here, evidence that small beginnings of impurity soon degenerate into gross transgressions; and here, the deeply significant fact, made most manifest, *that licentiousness is pre-eminently the crime into which, in the end, unfaithfulness to God and his truth will lead.*

On the other hand, we have in this Heaven-provided guide beautiful and attractive instances of the influence of the gospel in producing works of faith and charity that honor God and bless our fellow-men; noble patience under delay and opposition and provocation of every kind; heroic endurance of poverty and suffering and persecution for the name of Jesus; perseverance in toil and weariness and hardship and hardness in duty; fortitude under reproach and wrongs and imprisonments and tortures for the sake of Him who shed his heart's blood for his people; fidelity to the blessed Master in the face of danger and anguish and death; determined repugnance to evil and approach to evil of every kind; adherence to the divine will, and walking in the light that was sent down from heaven; and carefulness to shun the least contamination of evil or the least defilement of sin. All these are produced by the power of the gospel in the heart, and all tend to produce holiness of life and conformity to Him who is the high and holy example. These are specimens of the varied tendencies which were at once manifested when the gospel

was first planted, and they were providentially erected into a beacon for the directing of the Church in all her subsequent vicissitudes.

### 15. THE SPIRIT RECORDED THE EXPERIMENT IN A SPECIAL MANNER.

It is worthy of careful study that not only did the special providence of God guide in this first great experiment of the gospel, so that it might be fitted for a beacon in all after-time, but that the Spirit of God also made a special record of it, in order that it might be read and known while the world stands. After a full trial had been made, God, by special communication, sent it down to that world which was to be benefited thereby. The Holy Ghost placed it here in the Sacred Book, and in a conspicuous place in that book, so that it might convey instruction that would always be applicable. In this inspired record of the first encounter of the truth as it is in Christ Jesus with the representatives of the pagan world there are certain remarkable things which have not, perhaps, received sufficient attention.

There is, *first*, the fact that at the same time with making the record God also stored away the proof of its being authentic—proof that would be brought to light in after-days. Thus it stands. His providence guided the experiment, his Spirit put it upon record, and then God allowed time and the commotions of wars and the blight of Mohammedanism to cover up in the ruins of those old cities the evidence of the authenticity of every word, and to keep it there ready to be exhumed in these last days, for the confounding of infidelity, the comfort of believers, and the aid of the student of Scripture in comprehending the riches of the eternal Word.

In the *second place*, this record comes to us in a form that is calculated to make the deepest possible impression. It might have been made in plain didactic language which we could easily have understood, but the Spirit, on the other hand, sends it to us in such a novelty of form, in such unusual kind of language, and in such impressive imagery that attention must be arrested and the mind interested. Everything conspires to make it most impressive. We see John, the aged, drawing near to the time of his reunion with his beloved Lord; we are taken to the solitary island of Patmos; we behold the sublime manifestations of the Deity; every element of our souls is aroused by the wondrous names that are given to the enthroned Son of God; from heaven we hear the stirring command, "Write the things which thou

hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter;" then we behold the grand panorama of living men in the seven living churches. All these conspire to make the most deep and abiding impression.

In the *third place*, the record is made in the most brief manner that we can imagine. A full description of the first great contact of the gospel with the representatives of the pagan world in two chapters! This was wisely ordered. Because of its brevity the record will be more certainly read and grasped and remembered.

In the *fourth place*, such points of duty or danger or privilege are here brought forward as are calculated to cover great unchanging principles. The special thing presented in the record may not at first appear of much importance in itself, but as a sample of tendencies upward or downward it may be most valuable. It may look forward to vast results which it covers in all their essential features. These small generic elements may embrace applications that are boundless in number and degree. This is a characteristic of these messages which is worthy of close attention. It may not in itself be of much consequence, but the principle involved is often of immense moment. Every feature of church life at the present time may be traced back to some one of these germs of the gospel's earliest experience. In very small points found here we often have principles presented which are of eternal obligation. *In all these peculiarities of the messages we have unmistakable evidence that they are framed in a special manner, so that there might be a suitable and reliable guide for the Church in all her coming vicissitudes.*

### 16. THE BEACON TO BE MADE CONSPICUOUS.

It is worthy of special attention that the charge is made very emphatic that the beacon formed by these messages be raised up conspicuously in the sight of the whole Church of every age and country. The light was to be made so bright and to be held so high that the whole world could see it; then the Church need not launch out upon the unknown sea of the centuries in utter darkness. There would be at least this Heaven-ordained light to relieve the gloom. It was to throw its radiance over every track of ocean, over every rock and quicksand, over every current and drift, over every headland and harbor. There was to be guidance on every point of privilege and duty and danger.

The constant use of the number seven in every element of the messages shows that this full guidance to all believers on every

point was intended. Seven was the number of absolute completeness, and its remarkable use in these messages makes it very certain that here is full provision for all the guidance of all the people of God. All was to be through and for Christ, whose symbol is seven. The light of this blessed beacon was to illuminate all that should be done or avoided. Moreover, it was to extend to every branch and age and country of the Church. This is made singularly emphatic. There is deep meaning in the words, "*And all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts.*" Still more significant is it—so significant that we cannot dwell on it too much—that seven times over, that is, at the close of each message, we have the stirring call, "*He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.*" He that hath the power of hearing, let him give good heed. He that hath eyes, let him look with all attention. Whoever, all the world over, all the ages through, hath ears, let him listen, for the message is addressed to him as directly as if there were not another man to hear it. The message is for all. It is to receive the closest attention and to be followed practically by every soul.

The position on the pages of the Book of God of these seven messages is calculated to make them prominent. They are hung up on the very front of the Apocalypse. In the most conspicuous part of this great book of the future—the book which contains the mysterious roll of Providence, the book which the Lion of the tribe of Judah alone could open, the book with which Revelation closes—on the very brow of this book does this beacon of God stand in brightness and glory. Is it not deeply significant that this mere fragment of the Church's first history should be inserted here so strangely between the sublime description of Deity in the first chapter and the magnificent prophetic unfolding of the kingdom of God which fills the rest of the book? What a noble elevation for this light which God would throw over all the ocean of human destiny! What adoration is due to our God, that this light of the gospel, simple and unadulterated as it was at first, should have been raised so very high on the very headland of the Church's history!

### 17. LESSONS OF THE BEACON.

These two chapters are eminently the practical part of the book of Revelation, and as such they have a peculiar value for all the people of God. The practical life of the churches, in its various

forms and degrees, is brought out here in a manner which must necessarily make an impression of a deep and abiding character. Forms of church government and polity are not described or inculcated here. Even doctrines are not specially taught. Not these, but the life of Christ in the soul and through individual souls in the Church—perchance that life as founded on doctrines and order elsewhere inculcated,—this is that which the Holy Ghost here portrays. Its aim is to describe the results of the truths and principles of the gospel when they are brought home with living power to the soul.

It is manifest that *what God has communicated to us in such an especial way ought to receive from us especial study.* To say that this portion of the Apocalypse is a special message to us from God in heaven is to say the very highest that could be said of its value and its claims. A message from God, whose knowledge of our wants is perfect, whose rectitude is most trustworthy, and whose benevolence is illimitable! And such is this message standing at the commencement of the revelation of all the future, and almost at the close of the Book of God—a message to all the churches on earth and pertaining to all the vital interests of the kingdom. Shall God speak to us in such a way, and we not attend? Shall he send us a most momentous communication, and we not give good heed? All our reverence, all our love, all our gratitude, all that is high and holy within us, exclaim against such treatment of a message from our God.

Moreover, would God speak to us in such a special way had he not corresponding blessings ready to go with his words? Oh no! Earnest as are the words he utters, in keeping with them would be the benefits he would heap on those who would heed them.

Then most deeply should we study each one of these messages which come to us with such impressiveness from our loving Lord. We should study them with our whole soul quickened to know exactly what their meaning is, to fathom their wondrous words which have come down to us through the centuries, to rise near to the very heart of that dear Saviour who so greatly cared for us, to reach all the provisions which God has made for our sojourn here on earth. We should carefully study the messages for these reasons, as well as to aid in raising the Church which Christ has redeemed with his own blood to that beauty and majesty for which she was intended.

It should be carefully noted that *this is the great panacea which*

*God has provided for all the wants of the Church, even at the present time.* And then, warned of Heaven in this direct and impressive manner, we should follow the divine signals wherever they may point—follow them, whether the world approves or disapproves, whether it be fashionable or unfashionable, customary or not customary—follow them, whether at the time it be according to our feelings or not—follow them, come life or come death. Oh, with what heart and soul should we intently study and carefully follow the messages which our enthroned King sends us through his light- and life-giving Spirit!

In this matter it would be wise for us to follow a well-remembered saying of Rev. Dr. Archibald Alexander. His rich experience and sanctified common sense always made his counsel on practical religious things specially valuable. When consulted concerning novel plans for the advancement of the kingdom, or doubtful schemes of work, his reply in tones not soon forgotten would be, "You cannot improve upon God's plans." The very essence of practical wisdom and obedience was here. God's plans for the advancement of his cause cannot be improved. He knows as creature cannot know the weakness, the wants, the trials, and temptations of men, and in his Word he has made full provision for them all. From his exalted throne he looks down and beholds all the efforts that men have made, all the experiments they have tried; and with all this lying plainly before him, and with a heart yearning in love over his people, and a wisdom that never makes any mistake, he gives these plans in the messages as the substance of all his people should do in helping forward the work of his kingdom. Is not this his counsel? Had he not beheld all the efforts which his children had ever made? Was not his wisdom infallible to judge of what was best? Did not a love which passeth all understanding prompt him to dictate these plans for all his people to follow? And have they not been tested a thousand times and always proved effectual in accomplishing our Lord's heavenly purposes of love? How well then might it be said to us, "You cannot improve upon God's plans." We may sometimes think otherwise. We may sometimes imagine that these plans and these words are antiquated—that they were given for a condition of the Church so utterly different from the present times that others much more appropriate can be used now. We may imagine that we can meet the present wants of men with efforts more direct and with plans more modern, and with language better understood. It is all a great mistake! Did not our Lord, with all the experience of man-

kind before him, with a heart yearning over us in infinite love, and with a wisdom that could not err, lay down for us these plans of the messages; and can we improve on his way? Is there for us any plan so docile, so wise, and so loving and loyal, as to take these heavenly counsels as our guide at every point, and our light in all darkness and perplexity? We may rest assured that his plans of duty and of privilege are always the best. If we follow them we shall make no mistake. The Holy Spirit will assuredly bless the use of his own methods. His Word has been spoken, and we may trust it. We need only give good heed and follow, and soon we shall find that "the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

# EPHESUS.

THE LIGHT OF ASIA.

THE HOME OF THE HOLY THEOLOGIAN.

## THE MESSAGE.

Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write: These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks;

I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars:

And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.

Nevertheless I have *somewhat* against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE LIGHT OF ASIA.

In ancient times Ephesus was deservedly named "The Light of Asia." For excellent reasons it was termed by Pliny one of the eyes of Asia, Smyrna being the other. According to no less authority than that of Strabo, it was "one of the best and most glorious of cities, and the greatest emporium of the proper Asia." To the Christian world it has a place of equal importance, among other considerations, because it was the home, in his latter years, of the beloved disciple John, "the holy theologian."

Among the cities of antiquity there were few more renowned than it. In the early history of the gospel it stood next to Jerusalem in its influence upon the glorious cause. It was justly renowned because under the Romans it was the capital of Asia Minor; because it was the centre of the vast commerce which moved all the adjacent lands and seas; because many of the most momentous wars of the age made bloody the fields by which it was surrounded; because within its walls was contained one of the world's seven great wonders; because it was the scene of the most successful toils of Paul, of John, of Timothy, of Apollos, and of others beloved of the Lord; and because in it and through it the gospel made some of its earliest and grandest advances.

In an important sense and at a momentous crisis Ephesus was the metropolis of Christianity, as Christianity then was in the world. As Jerusalem had been at the first, as Antioch became soon afterward, as Constantinople was at a later day, and as Rome was for many centuries, so, at that period when the gospel first came in contact with paganism, and when the institutions of the Church were receiving their shape for all after-time, Ephesus held the position of being the centre, the capital, of the movements of the kingdom among men.

It was in Ephesus that the gospel was first preached with the leading aim of reaching the pagan world; up to that time the Jews were chiefly aimed at. Here it was that modes of church work and peculiarities of church life were first exemplified. Here it was that the missionary enterprise which is yet to rescue the

lost world first struck down its roots. Here it was that the gospel began to illustrate the modes in which it would save the lost. Here it was that the apostle of the Gentiles accomplished the greatest work of his life by preaching, working wonders, conquering the enemies of the Cross, and establishing the Church in one of the very darkest realms of paganism. Here it was that the beloved apostle John and his noble contemporaries, under the guidance of wisdom from above, laid the foundations of the heavenly kingdom, and toiled and suffered and died. Here it was that the saving influences of the gospel were manifested in the immeasurable benefits they impart. Here it was that the word and worships and institutions of Christianity assumed that fixed shape which they have ever since retained. The great truths on which the salvation of our souls depends, and which are yet to mould the destinies of the world, were first manifested here in their mighty influence upon a whole population sunk in pagan degradation. Here too it was that the epistle bearing the city's name, with its profound doctrines and teachings, was first read and comprehended and carried home to the hearts and lives of those whom God's own Spirit termed "saints" and "the faithful in Christ Jesus."

Every reminiscence which we can gather of this old city of the Greeks seems to exalt it more and more amidst the former habitations of mankind. "Ephesus was more Grecian than Antioch, more Oriental than Corinth, more populous than Athens, and more wealthy and more refined than Thessalonica." It lay two miles in from the sea, in the fair Asian meadow where the myriads of swans and other waterfowl disported themselves amid the windings of the Cayster. Its buildings were clustered under the protecting shadows of Coressus and Prion, and in the delightful neighborhood of the Ortygeian groves. Its haven, which had once been among the most sheltered and commodious in the Mediterranean, had been partly silted up by a mistake in engineering, but was still thronged with vessels from every part of the civilized world. It lay at the meeting-point of great roads which led northward to Sardis and Troas, southward to Magnesia and Antioch, and thus commanded easy access to the great river-valleys of the Hermus and the Meander, and the whole interior continent. Its seas and rivers were rich with fish; its air was salubrious, its position unrivaled, its population multifarious and immense. Its markets, glittering with the produce of the world's art, were the Vanity Fair of Asia. They furnished to the exile of Patmos the local

coloring of those parts of the Apocalypse in which he speaks of the "merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all thyine wood, and all manner vessels of ivory, and all manner vessels of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble, and cinnamon, and odors, and ointment, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and beasts, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and slaves, and souls of men." Ephesus was no less famous than it was vast and wealthy. Perhaps no region of the world has been the scene of so many memorable events in ancient history as has the shores of Asia Minor. It was from Lesbos and Smyrna and Ephesus and Halicarnassus that lyric poetry and epic poetry and philosophy and history took their rise; nor was any name more splendidly emblazoned in the annals of human culture than was that of Ephesus, the capital of Ionia. Such was the city of Ephesus at the time when these messages were sent down by the Son of God to the seven churches.

These things make Ephesus dear to us as Christians. It cannot be otherwise than one of the most sacred spots of earth to those who love the Church, the Cross, and the Redeemer. Around that spot where some of the most memorable events of time occurred would we linger reverently, and trace the footsteps of those apostolic men who first planted the gospel amid the gloom of pagan darkness; we would follow out the history of his work who was amongst the greatest of all mere men; we would listen to the heavenly sounds which come wafted to us over the waves from the hallowed isle of Patmos; we would gaze upon the sparkling waters of the Ægean, and have our souls filled with the memories which linger around each of its shores; and we would have our souls cheered and elevated by drinking of the water of life as it issues, clear as crystal, from the heavenly fountain that was opened to human view in the visions that were revealed in those favored regions of the gospel's grand victories.

### 1. WHERE AND WHAT WAS EPHESUS?

We have made a general statement concerning the renown of this ancient city. A more detailed account of it should now be given, in order that its influence upon the early Church may be the better appreciated.

Among the ruined cities of the world, such as Babylon, Nineveh, Samaria, Thebes, and Athens, Ephesus holds a conspicuous place. In its day it ranked among the crowded habitations of men. It

was one of the mighty arteries of humanity through which rushed the life-currents of our race. Great men, great objects, great events, great developments of providence, and great springs in the progress of the world were witnessed there.

It is difficult to arrive at reliable accounts of the leading events in the history of cities or nations which existed so long ago. They are so mixed with tradition and fable that it becomes almost impossible to separate fact from fiction. So it is with Ephesus. The first we hear of it is mere tradition. The story is that the Amazons were its founders. At the next stage of its history the mists are clearing away; but all is unreliable still, and the echoes come from the plains of Troy. Another stage, and we are among the deliberations of the Ionian League, the growth of Mycale, and the thousands of immigrants from Greece. Next we meet the kings of Libya and Ionia, the great Attalian dynasty, and the treasures of gold that flowed out from Sardis. The struggles for pre-eminence among the small but mighty nations fill the next records of the land. Then sweep over it the storms of wars aroused by the ambition of Alexander and his successors. Ages of the highest civilization, with their scholars, philosophers, and artists, with their magnificent theatres and their matchless temple, form the next stage of the history. Other ages pass over, and we are amid the sanguinary events that usher in the dominion of Rome and keep the land subject to that power. The scenes again change, and we witness great ecclesiastical councils in which the doctrines of Christianity are discussed and defined. Times of sad decay follow. Coldness and moral desolation overspread the land, whose glory seems to have departed. The blighting dominion of the False Prophet casts a pall over it so black and so cheerless that scarce a ray of hope has ever since been able to irradiate its fairest regions.

Meantime, how can we help wondering at the strange history which marks the annals of that city, which has made its location one of the most memorable spots on this whole earth? In it once dwelt great military leaders whose deeds of valor influenced the destiny of mankind; architects whose skill adorned the city with some of the most perfect structures that mortal eye ever beheld; artists whose pencils and chisels produced works that all after-time has vainly striven to equal; poets and orators whose glowing sentences were an important element of the richest literature of the world; scholars and philosophers whose very names were synonyms of the highest culture; statesmen

whose political wisdom wrought itself into the best systems of human government; and, far above all, noble Christian martyrs and apostolic men who rendered important service in laying the foundations of that divine kingdom which is yet to embrace and renew the race.

These were among its permanent residents; but then, as a great commercial centre, how many others, of almost every class and character, must have made it a place of temporary sojourn! Among these, as day by day one walked through the streets of the beautiful city, he would meet now with dust-covered devotees coming from many a distant city to worship at the shrine of Diana; now with pilgrims from the valley of the Euphrates and the shores of the Indus, on their way to the temple at Jerusalem; now with invalids from distant regions south and east, hastening to the healing waters of Pergamos; now with laborers returning from the golden sands of the Pactolus and the streams of the famous Sardis; now with officers in all their proud array hastening to join the ranks of Alexander or his successors; now with fishermen loaded with fish taken from the neighboring lakes; now with manufacturers from the busy mills and looms of Laodicea; now with farmers from every region of the interior, bringing with them the rich productions of that most fertile of earth's beautiful fields; now with merchants loaded with the overflowing abundance of many a goodly city east and west; and now with traders carrying of their riches from the districts of the Euphrates and the storehouses of the Indus.

Such was this great city in the days of its glory; but what is it now, with all these sources of its greatness blighted and gone? We follow up the little river Caicus for two miles from the Ægean Sea, and find ourselves among all that now remains of that once rich and splendid city. On the spot even its old name is gone, and we find a little cluster of wretched hovels called Ayasaluk. A miserably slow and ill-conducted railroad connects it, at a distance of about forty miles, with the great seaport of Smyrna, and is the usual way of approaching the ruins of the once famous emporium.

Of old it stood on the brink of the sea and constituted the great rallying-point of the multitudes of vessels whose sails whitened the Ægean, and of the vehicles of every description which connected it with the fertile regions of the interior; but gradually the sea has receded in consequence of the sediment which for centuries

has been deposited by the Cayster. From this cause it has resulted that, instead of lying on the shore of the sea, Ephesus has become the wretched hamlet named Ayasaluk. Instead of being the seat of earth's highest culture, it is now the location of a few wretched huts of shepherds scattered over a pestilential marsh about two miles from the mouth of the sluggish stream. It was once a scene of active prosperity, of beauty, and of fragrance; but now the beauty is gone, and we find nothing but wild, weird, cheerless desolation.

Our best impression of its ruins will be obtained from the words of travelers who have been amongst them. Says one: "The plain is covered with a rank, burnt-up vegetation, and is everywhere deserted and solitary. A few corn-fields are scattered along the site of the ancient city, which is marked by some large masses of shapeless ruins and stone walls. Toward the sea extends the ancient port, a pestilential marsh. Along the slope of the mountains and over the plain are scattered fragments of masonry and detached ruins. The ruins are of immense grandeur, and show how stupendous the buildings of the city must have been." "The Ephesians are now a few Greek peasants," says Chandler, "living in extreme wretchedness, dependence, and insensibility, the representatives of an illustrious people, and inhabiting the wreck of their greatness: some, the substructures of the glorious edifices which they raised; some, beneath the vaults of the stadium, once the crowded scene of their diversions; and some in the sepulchres which received their ashes."

Arundell, who explored the whole country more thoroughly than any other traveler, writes: "I was at Ephesus in 1824; the desolation was then complete. A Turk whose shed we occupied, his Arab servant, and a single Greek composed the entire population; some Turcomans excepted, whose black tents were pitched among the ruins."

Emerson very fully describes it as he saw it in 1828: "Ephesus is no more, and so is its modern successor. Thus all the wealth of Crœsus, the genius of Ctesiphon, the munificence of Alexander, and the glory of Lysimachus—to each of which Ephesus was indebted—have no other representative than the mouldering castle and the mud-walled cottages of Ayasaluk. . . . . The immense area of its stadium was under a crop of wheat, which, as it bent in graceful waves beneath the faint breezes from the valley, seemed to breathe a long-drawn sigh over the surrounding scene of departed grandeur. When reclining upon one of its mouldering seats one

cannot avoid feeling that there is a voice in its solitude and silence which speaks louder to the heart than the congregated shouts of the multitude that once filled its benches." The same author says again of this ruined city: "It is impossible to conceive a more depressing or melancholy prospect. On every side the speechless monuments of decay, a mouldering arch, a tottering column, a ruined temple. Solitude seems to reign triumphant; the wretched inhabitants of the village, Ayasaluk, are seldom to be seen save in early morning or in the cool of evening, when they sally from their muddy habitations to labor in the plains, which would be impossible during the burning meridian heat; neither motion nor sound is discernible, save the cry of the sea-bird on the slime or the tinkling of a sheep-bell amid the ruins. All, all is silence and decay. . . . . Nothing remains unaltered save the eternal hills and the mazy Cayster." Still further, the same author writes: "A more thorough change can scarcely be conceived than that which has actually occurred at Ephesus. Once the seat of active commerce, the very sea has shrunk from its solitary shores; its streets, once populous with the devotees of Diana, are now ploughed over by the Ottoman serf or browsed by the sheep of the peasant. It was the early stronghold of Christianity, and stands at the head of the apostolic churches of Asia. It was there that Paul says 'the word of God grew mightily, and prevailed.' Not a single Christian now dwells within it. Its mouldering arches and dilapidated walls merely whisper the tale of its glory, and it requires the acumen of the geographer and the active scrutiny of the exploring traveler to form a probable conjecture as to the very site of the 'first wonder of the world'. . . . That site was formerly on the edge of the sea; it is now two miles from it, by the intervention of banks formed by the stream of the Cayster." Thus utterly has the city been changed and ruined by the lapse of years.

### 2. AMOUNT OF ITS POPULATION.

There is no method by which we can reach a correct estimate of the number of the inhabitants of this great city at the time when these messages were sent. However, there are several things which make it certain that its population was very large. At first Ephesus was inferior to its neighboring city, Miletus, but in process of time the latter declined and the other in the same proportion increased. For a long time Ephesus was the largest and most important city of Asia Minor. It became, and long remained,

the metropolis of Asia. Its location on the seaboard, the excellency of its harbor, and its facilities for reaching every part of the interior, all combined to make it the great meeting-place of vessels engaged in the trade of the Mediterranean. Besides, the fine roads running along the coast, up the great mountain-slopes, and through the famous valleys of the Hermus, the Cayster, and the Meander, brought to it the various activities of the interior. From all these causes, and, as we shall see, from its temple worship, it resulted that Ephesus became the resort of all classes and characters of people from the busy islands, cities, and shores of the Levant, as well as of the multitudes of Orientals that flocked from the mystic land of the rising sun.

### 3. ITS COMMERCE.

In all the harbors which lined the coasts and islands that adorned the expanses of the Mediterranean, there was no port which attracted so much trade as that of Ephesus. It was the great commercial centre of the Levant. It held at that day the position which subsequently Smyrna, and afterward Constantinople, occupied amid the waters which then contained the world's busiest markets. The great highway of travel connecting the emporiums of the Grecian trade with those of the Persian and Euphrates waters had this city as its central station. Its shipping was immense. Into that splendid harbor rode the stately ships of that day—from the port of Smyrna, which was already becoming the chief haven of that neighboring coast; from Philippi, where the Roman legions held one of their leading military stations; from Rhodes, the adjoining island, so famous in the mighty deeds of those heroic ages; from many a bright sunny island of the Ægean, whose beauty had long been the theme of song and romance; from Athens, the home of the highest art and the school of earth's purest, most exalted wisdom; from Rome, the centre from which radiated the nerves and sinews of that moral waste; from Corinth, out of which sprung so many of the great impulses which have awakened and given new life to the activities of the ages; from Alexandria, whose history and whole learning had so much weight in shaping the government of the coming ages; and from Cæsarea, famed as the abode of the Roman governors, and still more renowned as the port which connected Jerusalem with all the great movements of the world. These were the connections which united Ephesus with the waters of the Icarian Sea. No less important were the links which bound

it to the fertile regions of the interior with their varied productions. The great roads running from it, over plains, up mountains, and along valleys, were thronged with grain and figs and flax and grapes, the product of its fields; with minerals from its mines; with lumber from its forests; with the finest marble from its quarries; with carpets and purple and parchment from its manufactories; with cattle from its shambles; and with fish from its lakes and rivers. All these formed the commerce connecting Ephesus with the interior. And then we must add the vast trade arising from the great temple, which we shall hereafter describe.

### 4. ITS INFLUENCE UPON OTHER LANDS.

The influence of Ephesus upon all the country immediately around it, as well as upon a large part of the civilized world, could hardly be over-estimated. This influence was both direct —in the efforts that were made to carry the tidings of salvation— and indirect, in the tendency of religious principles to work themselves out in every direction. As it was in Jerusalem, when it proved a centre from which rays emanated far and near throughout every land; with Rome, as it became a centre which spread the papacy in every quarter; and with Mecca, which did so much to spread the faith of Mohammed,—so was it that Ephesus sent out the doctrines of the gospel over all proconsular Asia, as well as through every channel which its commerce had opened. A similar tendency to spread abroad evil impulses had also characterized the city before it received the blessings of the gospel.

To appreciate what Christianity is capable of doing for any people, we should glance at what that evil character of Ephesus had formerly been. Its great temple of Diana, with its immediate surroundings, possessed the right of asylum, so that within that sacred enclosure criminals of all character were safe from the arrest of justice. An able pen has shown that this was the source of immeasurable evil: "It was ruinous to the morals and well-being of the city. The scum and villany, the crime of cheats and debtors and murderers of the country far and near, were sheltered by it from punishment, and the vicinity of the great temple reeked with the congregated pollutions of Asia. . . . . Ephesus became the corruptress of Ionia, the favorite scene of her most voluptuous love-tales, the lighted theatre of her most ostentatious sins." A faithful writer of that day depicts the vileness of temple and city in the most terrible language, and declares that he could do nothing but weep on account of the nameless iniquities which he

himself witnessed. Such was Ephesus before it heard the blessed sound of the gospel.

But the city which had done so much evil became a centre of light and truth. In the marvels of his providence God often conducts his Church in a way the last we would expect. He makes even "the wrath of man to praise him." How often has it been that the "battle of the warrior," with its "confused noise, and garments rolled in blood," has opened the way for the Bible, the Church, and the gospel!

Eminently were these marvels of providence manifested in the church of Ephesus, which stands out bright and impressive as a beacon to all after-ages. In the contrast with its previous depravity, which, shocking as it was, the power of the gospel was great enough to break through; in the tracks of its commerce as it threaded the world, casting up highways over which the tidings of the gospel could be conveyed to every quarter; in its learning, used as a vehicle for conveying to men the wisdom of Heaven which the great Teacher had come to impart; in the renown of the splendid city and temple, attracting together multitudes who would return home bearing with them the news of blessings from the throne of God greater than before ear had ever heard or eye had ever seen; even in the atrocious worship of Diana, which was the means of collecting thousands who were led to the adoration of him who was the glorious God of gods and Lord of lords,—by all these means, and by others which infinite wisdom and power either overruled or developed, that great city became the missionary centre that sent abroad the glorious gospel throughout that Asiatic land, throughout the world, and even down to the times in which we are now living.

### 5. FAMED CHIEFLY FOR ITS WORSHIP OF DIANA.

Ephesus was great in its wealth and elegance, in its commerce, in its heroic memories, in the variety and perfection of its culture, in its architectural splendors, but greatest of all in that it contained one, and perhaps the greatest, of the world's seven wonders—the *temple of Diana*. All that was great or rare in Ephesus was connected with Diana and her worship. The wealth, the power, the culture, the attractiveness, and the fame of Ephesus were all connected with Diana. We enter the renowned city, imbibe its spirit, become identified with its life, and then we begin to understand that Diana is, of a truth, the object before which every knee bows, the supreme attraction which draws

together the thousands of pilgrims from every quarter, the sacred mystery that occupies every thought and absorbs every purpose, the centre and spring of the commerce which is wafted by every gale or carried over every highway. Diana appoints every rite and gives meaning to every custom; Diana is the great idol whose priests and priestesses we meet on every street and avenue; Diana is the theme of conversation of friends when they meet, of the family circle, and of public discourses; Diana is praised by every tongue and almost breathed in every breath.

Among the most humiliating exhibitions of the degrading influence of sin, there is scarcely one so sad as that of the divine honor which the most cultivated of all the people of antiquity rendered to Diana and to other senseless deities. Every record concerning the origin of Diana is full of absurdity. Like the Palladium of Troy, the Minerva of Athens, and the Paphian Venus, her image was reported to have fallen from heaven. Whatever its origin, it was so far back in the dimness of the ages that no reliable account can be given of it. It was an absurd Eastern monster, black from age or from the substance of which it consisted. Some writers say it was of gold, some of blackened ivory, some of ebony; the most probable account is that it was formed from the wood of a grapevine. The whole appearance of this idolatrous object must have been monstrous. As one has written: "It was in reality a hideous fetish. . . . . It was a figure swathed like a mummy, covered with monstrous breasts. . . . . The very ugliness and uncouthness of the idol added to the superstitious awe which it inspired. . . . . Blackened by paint like a hideous doll," it must have awakened feelings of disgust as well as awe. It was in fact a monster, huge, uncouth, deformed, ugly in form; as if God had given the people up to erect one of the most glorious structures human hands ever reared, that it might contain an object that was simply monstrous! Such is idolatry! Such is the gross and degrading absurdity into which they sink who forsake the true God and follow idols!

The Ephesian Diana, though such a monster, was worshiped with the greatest ceremony. The character of her worship varied in accordance with the attributes that were ascribed to her. She was generally described as the source of nature, the mother of all things, the principle of productiveness in all living creatures. In accordance with this idea her worship assumed many forms. In Taurus (the Crimea) she was propitiated by human sacrifices; in Sparta there was a public scourging of the youth; but generally her worship was of a mild and gentle nature.

### 6. HER GREAT TEMPLE.

Ephesus was the most magnificent of what Ovid calls "the magnificent cities of Asia," and the temple of Diana at Ephesus was the most magnificent and splendid structure of Asia. This marvelous temple, one of the "seven wonders of the world," was originally planned by Chersiphron, and enlarged and adorned, or even rebuilt, by Pæonius, more than five hundred years before the Christian era. On the night, as is said, when Alexander the Great was born, B. C. 356, it was set on fire by an incendiary named Herostratus. In punishment for his crime he was tortured on the rack, and amid his agonies acknowledged that his only motive was that he might get a name that would go down to future ages. The Ionians decreed that the mention of his name should be punished with death. But this very enactment gave it immortality.

But the temple was not suffered to lie in ruins. The work of rebuilding was entered upon at once, and with an enthusiasm that awakened all Asia. It was erected anew on a scale of magnitude and magnificence that far excelled the former building. All parts of the land—all its cities and towns—vied with one another in helping forward the work. The wealth of princes and kings was lavished upon it. The ladies of Ephesus contributed their most costly jewels. Nothing was kept back. The whole wealth of the land was ready to be offered. Twenty-seven kings presented each a pillar the elegance of which was a gage of the enthusiastic rivalry. Alexander the Great, after his victories, offered to pay the whole cost of reconstruction, on condition that he might inscribe his name as dedicator on the pediment; but his offer was refused. Notwithstanding all this enthusiasm, two hundred and twenty years elapsed before the new edifice was completed.

It was the largest Greek temple ever constructed. Its length was 425 feet, and its width 220 feet. It had an area more than four times that of the Parthenon at Athens, and even the Olympeium was only about two-thirds as great. Everything about the temple was projected in the most massive and substantial manner. Its foundations were deep-laid and enduring. The materials of which it was built in every part were the most precious which the wealth, the art, and the enterprise of the age could furnish: its walls of the purest white marble; its massive folding doors of solid cypress-wood polished in the highest

manner; its stairway framed from a huge grapevine brought from the island of Cyprus; its roof of cedar-wood supported by columns of jasper on bases of marble. On these columns hung gifts of priceless value. At the end of the temple stood the great altar adorned by the bas-relief of Praxiteles, behind which fell the great folds of a purple curtain. Behind this curtain was the adytum, in which stood the sacred image of the goddess "which fell down from Jupiter;" and beyond the adytum was the apartment which, inviolable under divine protection, was regarded as the securest treasure-depository in the ancient world. The peristyle around the temple was of itself a splendid structure. On each side and end, surrounding the temple, there were two rows of columns, one hundred and twenty in number, sixty feet high, polished as smooth as glass, and finished in the perfection of art—some of them of Parian marble, some of jasper, and all of them stones of great value. They had been brought to their destined location at immense labor and cost. Each of them had been the gift of a prince and had a history of its own. These, and those around the Parthenon at Athens, were the most perfect colonnades which the hands of man ever formed.

Such in splendor and magnificence was the temple of Diana at Ephesus, in the days when Paul lived and labored in that city, and when these messages from the enthroned King were sent to the seven churches in Asia. No wonder that it was for that time and age the centre of life and activity, political and moral as well as religious. No wonder that its influence was unbounded, and that under her sway the inhabitants of the city, devoted to her worship, cried out in the infatuation of their zeal, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!"

### 7. THE HOME OF MAGIC.

The temple of Diana became the seat of heathen magic. The worship of the goddess and the practice of magical art became inseparably connected. A class of men skilled in its incantations and cabalistic charms wandered from city to city wielding an immense influence. These men came finally to make Ephesus their home and the centre of their operations. The Ephesians were specially addicted to astrology, sorcery, incantations, amulets, exorcisms, and every kind of magical imposture, chiefly through the influence of this class who flocked to the city. The hold which the practice of magical arts had on the people may be seen from the narrative in the Acts of the Apostles, when the professors

of those arts came to the apostle Paul and burnt their books of sorcery, worth, as it is stated, no less than eight thousand dollars.

### 8. EPHESIAN LETTERS.

One important branch of the occult arts connected with the worship of Diana was that known as the "Ephesian letters." These mysterious symbols were engraved on the crown, the girdle, and the feet of the goddess. They consisted of certain Greek words or monograms, of which these are specimens: Askion, Kataskion, Lix, Tetrax, Dammameneus, Aision. When pronounced they were regarded as a charm, and they were directed to be used especially by those who were in the power of evil spirits. When written they were worn on the body as a safeguard against wounds and maladies and as a pledge of prosperity and happiness. Many curious stories were told of their influence. Crœsus, it is said, repeated the mystic words on his funeral pile, and immediately the heart of the Persian king relented and he was spared. An Ephesian wrestler always struggled successfully against an antagonist from Miletus until it was discovered that the mystic words were bound around his ankle: they were stealthily removed, and he was instantly conquered. The study of these symbols was regarded as an important science, and many costly books were compiled by its professors.

### 9. GRAND REPOSITORY OF ART.

The temple of Diana was also the repository of the most celebrated works of art. The choicest paintings, the masterpieces of Apollodorus, Apelles, and Zeuxis, were collected on its walls. Its corridors were filled with the triumphs of the statuary's art by Praxiteles and others—statues which modern skill has not rivaled. A well-informed author wrote: "The dimensions of this great temple excite ideas of uncommon grandeur from mere massiveness, but the notices we collect from its internal ornaments will increase our admiration. It was the repository in which the great artists of antiquity dedicated their most perfect works to posterity. Praxiteles and his son Cephisodotus adorned the shrine; Scopas contributed a statue of Hecate; Timarete the daughter of Mycon, the first female artist upon record, furnished a picture of the goddess, the most ancient in Ephesus; and Parrhasius and Apelles, both Ephesians, employed their skill to embellish the panels of the walls. The excellence of these performances may be supposed to have been proportioned to their price; and a pict-

ure of Alexander grasping a thunderbolt, by the latter, was added to the superb collection at the expense of twenty talents of gold.

### 10. GREAT TREASURY.

It contributed not a little to the fame of Diana's temple that in process of time it came to be the chief bank or treasury of proconsular Asia. The sanctity of the shrine rendered whatever might be deposited in it more secure than could locks or bars or bolts. Kings, princes, and others who had wealth, throughout all Asia and from other lands also, brought their money and valuables and deposited them in it for safe-keeping. Trophies which had been gained in war were brought by the victors both for exhibition and for safe-keeping. In it property was safe not only from the burglar, but also from the plunder of wars and civil strifes and commotions. In that age of violence, when war was the business of most nations, this was much needed. The security which the temple gave to whatever was entrusted to it was perfect. Its sacredness forbade any rapacious or stealthy hand from even the attempt at robbery. Nowhere else could valuables be made so safe as within its walls.

### 11. SHRINE-MANUFACTURING.

A very important business carried on at Ephesus in connection with the temple and its goddess was the manufacture and sale of models of the shrine and its idol. They were portable statuettes or images of gold, silver, or even sometimes of wood. Their most general form was that of a box modeled after the great building, with the image within it. The uses made of these little shrines were various. They were carried by travelers on their journeys and by armies on their military expeditions. Visitors to the city and temple purchased them as mementos of the magnificent shrine and of the heaven-descended goddess to whom it was dedicated. This traffic gave employment to a multitude of artisans and kept up a commerce of great moment to the city.

### 12. LARGE REVENUE ATTRACTED.

From this and other causes the temple, with the accompaniments of its worship, brought a vast revenue into the city. One important source of income was the concourse of multitudes of people. The temple with its worship required a great number of attendants. A throng of priests, priestesses, sacristans, guards, laborers, mechanics, and tradesmen lived by the temple. Simply

to conduct its affairs required a host of men and women. Add to these the shrine-manufacturers, the thousands of visitors that constantly flowed into the city, and the concourse of pilgrims that came to worship at the sanctuary; when we have estimated all these we shall have some idea of the multitudes the temple collected and the immense revenue derived from that source. Besides this there were rich legacies constantly flowing in for the support of its worship; and, like the great European cathedrals, it had large endowments from lands and from fisheries such as the Silenorian Lakes, yielding an immense income. These various sources of revenue not only enriched the temple, but also tended to produce elegance and luxury in the city.

### 13. CROWDS ATTRACTED.

An obvious influence of the temple and its worship was the collection in the city of great crowds of people, both permanent residents and visitors. Permanent inhabitants were attracted that they might be continually in reach of the sacred fane with its religious influences. Guards of the temple, artists and artisans working on it, as well as proconsuls and other officers of the government, formed a large population of themselves. Moreover, Ephesus being an assize town, there were ever residing in it a large number of persons connected with the courts. Still other residents consisted of artists who were either studying the productions of the great masters in the temple or were themselves adding to its adornments. This constituted the permanent population of the city; but it was also thronged with an immense concourse of transient residents. Of these there were multitudes who came to visit the temple and to worship in its sacred precincts; pilgrims from every land, that their lives might be hallowed by bowing down before the heaven-born goddess; artists bearing with them their works, that they might find places for them in the halls of the temple; others still, bringing with them treasures of money and jewels and plate to be deposited in the custody of the inviolable shrine. The environs of the temple were thus the centre of the most busy life, of the gayest fashion, and of the highest culture. They were the very heart of every element, political, social, and religious.

### 14. RIGHT OF ASYLUM.

Among the many things which attracted multitudes to Ephesus through its great temple, we must give especial notice to the right

of asylum with which it had been favored. This privilege was granted because of its supposed sacredness. Where this right of asylum was enjoyed criminals of every kind and degree could resort, and the hand of neither justice nor revenge could follow them. Under that protection they were perfectly safe, black as may have been their crimes. The temple and its precincts in this respect were hallowed ground. This was the first sanctuary in Asiatic Greece which secured refuge for the misdoer who took shelter within its precincts. At first the privilege reached one-eighth of a mile in each direction; afterward it was extended so as to embrace nearly the whole city.

A more prolific source of evil could hardly be imagined. It attracted to the city crowds of fugitives from justice and evil-doers of every class. Such profligates and vagabonds soon became an influential element of the population, whose malign tendency was seen in corrupting the whole body. The refugees strengthened each other in evil-doing, and sent out depraving influences in every direction. They contaminated the whole population. So manifestly evil was this right of asylum that it was withdrawn by the emperor Tiberius.

### 15. WORLD'S FAIR.

Once a year there was held at Ephesus a grand festival in honor of Diana which excited the greatest public interest. It extended through the whole month of May—Diana's month—and all its days and nights were one continued revelry.

The throngs which the festival attracted were increased by the assizes for the whole region which were held at the same time. Of themselves these provincial courts drew together great multitudes. Others were attracted to the city at the same time by the annual games, which awakened the greatest excitement. Others again were drawn together by the great market which was then held, in which valuable articles of every kind, accumulated throughout the year, were exposed for sale. Others came, attracted by the sanctity of the goddess, and bearing costly offerings to her image and presents of great value to her priests.

### 16. MEMORABLE THINGS CONCERNING EPHESUS AND ITS TEMPLE.

(*a*) *Alexander at Ephesus.* Among the many stirring scenes which made Ephesus one of the most memorable spots on the globe, not the least exciting were the visits it received from Alexander the Great on some of his victorious marches in Asia. At

one time we see him leading his hardened veterans from the blood-stained walls of Sardis down through the river-valleys into its eastern gates; at another, before setting out for the conquest of Miletus, at the head of his invincible cohorts, in one of the grandest pageants that eye ever beheld, he marched up to the shrine of Diana and rendered obeisance to the goddess. So deeply impressed was the conqueror of the world with the grandeur of the great temple that he offered its priests the treasures he had accumulated in his campaign if he would be allowed simply to have his name emblazoned amid the gorgeous ornaments over its splendid portal. He offered; but so unapproachably great was the goddess that such privilege could not be granted even to him.

(*b*) *Last years of the Evangelist.* Many a glory adheres to the memory of Ephesus, but none more bright than that it was the home, in his last years, of John the Evangelist, whose epithet *Ayasaluk* ("holy theologian") still lingers in the vicinity. In that brilliant city he toiled on in the work of the kingdom, illustrating its spirit and sanctioning its movements by his apostolic authority, until he had reached the age of one hundred years. In the mean time he suffered, among other persecutions, that which sent him a prisoner to Patmos, from whose dreary rock he returned these messages, with the Apocalypse of which they are the preface, which had been imparted to him in divine vision. It is more than probable that he penned in Ephesus the three epistles which bear his name, and also the record of our Lord's days on earth, which lets us more deeply into the divine mind and raises us up more highly amid the sublimity of celestial glories than any other writings that earth ever knew.

These closing years of the life of "the disciple whom Jesus loved" are but dimly revealed to us, and we are enabled to see only a few of their touching events, and those only in glimpses. Where his body was laid there is no stone to mark. His grave is hidden, and will remain so until he shall arise to meet his returning Lord. This ministry of John's closing days is one of the things which make Ephesus among the most memorable spots of earth. How suggestive to the thoughtful mind it is, that, while all else of Ephesus is covered up and forgotten, the memory of that most godly of its inhabitants lives in the name still remembered there—the name *Ayasaluk* (ἅγιος θεόλογος), "holy theologian."

(*c*) *Its marbles in modern buildings.* The best remains of the great temple are to be seen not amid the marshes of its old site, but in great cathedrals of other lands. After barbarous hands had

broken down its walls and columns, and its ornaments had been plundered, other ruthless hands engaged in the desolating work of carrying away the elegant fragments to place them in other structures. The immense ruin became a quarry from which builders of mosques and churches gathered the material they needed. Genoese traders came with their ships and carried its blocks to many of the cities of the Mediterranean. Now the marble of Diana's temple may be seen in the pilasters which adorn the facade of St. Mark's in Venice, in the beautiful columns that ornament the great church of Pisa, and in the pillars that support the dome of St. Sophia's in Constantinople.

(*d*) *Seven sleepers of Ephesus.* A singular story concerning Ephesus has secured a very wide currency. It was related by Gregory of Tours in the sixth century; it found its way into the Koran, and was generally credited by all Mohammedans; and even Gibbon quotes it in his pages. The story is that under the merciless persecution that raged in the time of the emperor Decius, seven noble Ephesians, young men of devoted piety and great courage, were forced to take refuge from their bloodthirsty enemies in a cave near the city. Their implacable persecutors traced them to their hiding-place and walled them up in their dark prison. They fell into a sleep which was prolonged supernaturally for a hundred and eighty-seven years. Then, some stones being removed from the entrance, a ray of light was admitted. They awoke thinking that they had slept but a few hours, and ignorant of all the events which had passed during their sleep. One of their number left the cave and found his way into the city to secure food. The singularity of his dress and the antiquity of the coin he offered in pay startled the inhabitants, while he was filled with amazement to see everywhere the cross which had before been the fatal signal for persecution. The news spread. The suffering heroes emerged from their dungeon and were escorted into the city by an immense throng of rejoicing citizens. Their lives, however, were continued for only a brief period. As if bound together by a common destiny, they expired at the same instant, and so together they entered into the rest immortal.

(*e*) *Epistle to the Ephesians.* The name of Ephesus is a household word wherever the New Testament is read, in consequence of the epistle bearing that name which forms so valuable a portion of the Sacred Word. That epistle of Paul has rendered important aid in giving shape to the doctrines and order of our Church. It is amongst the most profound of compositions ever penned. It

is full of truths most important concerning Christ and his salvation. Its theme pertains to the grandeur of the kingdom and the glories of the heavenly King. On its pages are found mysteries most exalted. It gives a thrilling interest to this venerable writing that it was received and read by "the saints which are of Ephesus," to whom it was first addressed, beneath the shadow of the world's most renowned temple of idolatry.

### 17. COUNCILS OF EPHESUS.

After many vicissitudes, in the course of which it experienced the heights of glory and the depths of humiliation, there came to Ephesus a crisis in the year A. D. 262, when it was sacked by the Goths and left in ruins. It was afterward rebuilt, but was never again restored to its former greatness. During the centuries of its decay, after this overthrow, the most noticeable events of its ecclesiastical history were the two councils which bear its name.

The first was held in the year A. D. 431. It was the third general council of the Church, and was composed of about two hundred bishops. Its presiding officer was Cyril of Alexandria. The great question for the settlement of which it was convened was that which involved the Nestorian heresy. That error was condemned, and at the same time the doctrine was announced which has been the faith of the Church ever since—namely, that in Christ there is one person, but two natures—the human and the divine.

The other council which gave Ephesus a kind of notoriety was called the "Robber's Council." It was held eighteen years after the other, and was attended by one hundred and thirty bishops. It was presided over by Dioscorus, also of Alexandria, a man of violent and overbearing temper, through which the whole assembly was thrown into disorder and turmoil. When he could not induce those who held different views to yield to his, he would bring in the military and force them. The result was that most disgraceful scenes occurred in the council, and secured for it in history the unenviable name "Council of Robbers." So violent did its proceedings sometimes become that Hilary, the papal delegate from Rome, narrowly escaped losing his life, while Eusebius, the leader of the party whom the president opposed, did actually die from the violence of the soldiery. The decisions of this scandalously conducted council were reversed by the Council of Chalcedon, B. C. 451.

These two evidences of life are the chief gleams that mark the dreary centuries of the decay of both church and city. They are

the flickering rays that indicate the utter departure of the candlestick from the place where it once shone so brightly.

### 18. EPHESUS AN UTTER WASTE.

Why is it that Ephesus is now such an utter desolation? As described by Arundell, its ruin must be deeply impressive: "What would have been the astonishment of the beloved apostle and Paul and Timothy if they could have foreseen that a time would come when there would be in Ephesus neither angel nor church nor city! Once it had an idolatrous temple celebrated for its magnificence as one of the wonders of the world, and the mountains of Corycus and Prion re-echoed the shouts of ten thousand tongues, 'Great is Diana of the Ephesians!' Once it had Christian temples almost rivaling the pagan in splendor, wherein the image that fell from Jupiter lay prostrate before the cross, and as many tongues, moved by the Holy Ghost, made public the avowal that 'Great is the Lord Jesus!' Some centuries pass on, and the altars of Jesus were again thrown down to make way for the delusions of Mohammed; the cross is removed from the dome of the church, and the crescent glitters in its stead, while within the kiblah is substituted for the altar. A few years more, and all is silence in the mosque and in the church! A few unintelligible heaps of stone, with some mud cottages, untenanted, are all that remain of the great city of Ephesus. The busy hum of a mighty population is silent in death. 'Thy riches and thy fairs, thy merchandise, thy mariners, and thy pilots, thy caulkers, and the occupiers of thy merchandise, and all thy men of war are fallen.' Even the sea has retired from the scene of desolation, and a pestilential morass covered with mud and rushes has succeeded to the waters which brought up the ships laden with merchandise from every country."

What were the causes which resulted in this change, so sad to contemplate? Time is not ordinarily so inexorable in its treatment of the proudest productions of mortal hands. Other great cities of olden times, and no more substantial than it, have not sunken thus under the pressure of centuries. It was not thus with Jerusalem, though beaten by many a storm of war; nor with Athens, so tempting to plunderers in its grandeur; nor with Thebes, whose foundations were washed by a thousand inundations of the Nile; nor with Alexandria, around which many an army has been arrayed with every engine of destruction; nor even with Smyrna and Pergamos and Philadelphia, its sister cities of the seven. All these are still living and cherishing a goodly

population after centuries of vicissitudes and dangers. Why, then, has Ephesus, with foundations and bulwarks as strong as theirs, so utterly fallen and become almost obliterated from earth? Why has this city, once so splendid, and this church, once so great and influential, become such a scene of desolation? The answers to this are plain, and at least one of them is most suggestive. They are three in number, and demand thoughtful consideration.

The *first* arises from man's violence toward his fellow-man. We have already referred to it. In the course of centuries the city became the scene of riots, insurrections, wars, plunderings, and devastations of many kinds. Barbarism rifled it of its riches in treasures, ornaments, and other valuables. Other rising cities then carried away its marbles and precious stones of palaces, colonnades, and temples. Genoese, Pisans, and Constantinopolitans vied with each other in stripping the city of the most splendid materials which had composed its buildings.

The *second* cause was physical. It arose from the contour of the country. There was a rapid descent in the water-shed from the mountains of the interior down to the shore. In the vicinity of Ephesus this slope was drained by the river Cayster, which, running between the two mountains Tmolus and Messogis, came down, especially in the season of floods, charged with the washings of the highlands. This material was deposited at the mouth of the river where the city was situated. In process of time the accumulating mud began to block up the entrance of the stream into the sea. A mistake in engineering intended to keep the channel open had the opposite effect, and it gradually became silted up and the river filled. The site of the city after a while turned into a swamp and receded farther and farther from the shore. The desolating process went on until palaces, theatre, and temple were covered and the city was obliterated. In that condition it lay for centuries. The very site of the temple and other magnificent structures was unsuspected until brought to light by the laborious excavations of Mr. J. T. Wood, on behalf of the British Museum, during the years 1863–74.

The *third* and chief cause, and that which no doubt led to the others, was the doom inflicted by Him "who walketh in the midst of the golden candlesticks." The solemn alternative which he gave to the church whose love had sinfully cooled was, "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." There fol-

lowed a slight pause in their downward course; but it was only for a brief period—then they grew colder and colder. They did not repent, and so the candlestick was removed. Their gospel light and blessings were not destroyed from the earth: they were taken elsewhere, and Ephesus was ruined. The providence of God could have averted the calamities of war and pillage, as well as the devastations wrought by the floods from the mountains—but it did not; the destruction was rather accelerated. We can see the effects of the national and physical calamities, but back of them all and above them all was the curse of the Almighty, whose glory had been given to Diana. So surely and awfully will all God's threatenings be fulfilled if men will not heed the warnings and repent.

### 19. WHY WE DWELL SO LONG UPON THIS CITY.

Such was the city of Ephesus in its glory, its goddess Diana, its temple, renowned as one of the world's seven wonders, and its worship, as alluring as it could be made by human contrivance. It has not been without a special design that we have devoted so much space to these matters. We have kept a great object in view while wandering through those brilliant streets and lingering in the precincts of the splendid temple. We have studied city, goddess, temple, and worship because we have considered them the most thorough embodiment of idolatry that our earth has ever witnessed, and because they were providentially selected for a special purpose on that account. *We have been constrained to believe that this perfect embodiment of all that is attractive in idol-worship was permitted in order that in it might be manifested what the gospel had at first to encounter—had to encounter in all their might—and then, after a great struggle, conquered for ever.*

Behold that most formidable combination of all that was attractive in the most exalted form of pagan services! It was matured in the most advantageous location which the whole world had to offer; in the midst of a people highly cultivated and energetic; through a system most thoroughly studied and elaborated; through the aid of a wealth that was lavished with princely generosity; with every possible contrivance to render it adapted to all the passions and desires of the depraved heart; with a temple costly and elegant; with accompaniments as voluptuous as could be conceived by human heart; through an idol hallowed by associations that appealed to all that was dear in memory; through the attractions of the highest creations of art; with the inducement of a

people most cultured as worshipers; and with all the influence of a history most venerable. All these contributed to render the idolatry of Diana's temple in Ephesus as perfect as the human mind could conceive. It contained the most formidable opposition to the worship of the true God that was ever imagined or contrived.

All this should be understood; we have dwelt upon it so fully that it might be seen how the gospel, then and there, *at the beginning*, attacked paganism in its strongest hold. This was necessary for our purpose. If the gospel could conquer this, what could ever stand before it? *Paganism effloresced there, and thenceforward decayed, never again to flourish.*

# CHAPTER VIII.

## THE HOME OF THE HOLY THEOLOGIAN.

### 1. PLANTING THE CHURCH.

In studying the message to the church in Ephesus—or, indeed, any of the messages—our first effort must obviously be to reach as clear an understanding as in our power as to the nature of that church, its history, circumstances, peculiarities, privileges, and dangers. As, however, in the chapter on the planting of the seven churches we have already covered much of this ground, we would now refer to only a few of its most essential features. On many accounts this church of Ephesus, with its city, was highly favored, and had also peculiar temptations. From these favoring circumstances it resulted that its growth was rapid and it early became strong and influential.

It is probable that in the beginning it received an important impulse from the events of Pentecost which were undoubtedly felt in that city. Then, no doubt, the character of the people, so enlightened and enterprising, and of the place, one of the great centres of the activities of that age, would render important aid to the new movement. Moreover, its commerce, bringing it into connection with Jerusalem and other cities, would draw to it influences that would cause the gospel to be heard and received by large numbers. Among other favoring influences was the recorded fact that twelve persons who in former days had received the truth from the lips of John the Baptist had somehow drifted into Ephesus and were found there as confessed believers in Christ Jesus. Soon came Paul, the most earnest of apostles, and put forth his strongest and most protracted efforts, awakening a profound interest throughout the city. All these influences were rendered still more effective by miracles, so well adapted to that population, which the same zealous apostle was enabled to work. Several other most highly endued workers for Christ soon lent their aid, and foundations broad and deep were laid on which the structure arose with wondrous rapidity.

In tracing the rise and progress of the church of Ephesus, the

first agent who meets us as rendering effective service is the apostle Paul. His work must receive the most diligent study. At this distance of time, and so far from his field of activity, it is difficult for us to realize how great the service was which he rendered. In striving to appreciate that service we must picture to ourselves the devoted man, day after day and week after week, preaching in the synagogue or the hall of Tyrannus; discussing with objectors of every kind the great doctrines which pertained to the glory of Christ and his kingdom; pleading with his countrymen, as ready to give up his life for them, that they would heed their Scriptures and receive Jesus of Nazareth as their long-expected Messiah; showing others the absurdity, the folly, and the misery of the idolatry which filled the whole atmosphere; explaining the Word of God to every comer who would listen to his words; going about from house to house in earnest effort to awaken attention and to persuade men to accept the offered salvation; working miracles so surprising that no one could witness them without being satisfied that he held his commission directly from the hand of Almighty God; writing letters—some for unbelieving friends, that they might be brought to Christ, and some to distant churches which he strove to establish in the faith; and, amidst all, working daily with his own hands, that no one might insinuate that his efforts in the gospel were merely for the sake of worldly gain. His own description of his work for the kingdom there, given to the elders at the meeting in Miletus, was in these words: "Ye know from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations which befell me by the laying in wait of the Jews; and how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house." Added to these inspired words, we give the summary of what he did in planting the church of Ephesus, as collected by Dr. Charles Hodge: "It appears, from the account given by the sacred historian, that the effects of Paul's preaching in Ephesus were—1. 'The conversion of a great number of the Jews and Greeks; 2. The diffusion of the knowledge of the gospel throughout proconsular Asia; 3. Such an influence on the popular mind that certain exorcists attempted to work miracles in the name of that Jesus whom Paul's preaching had proved to be so powerful, and that other magicians, convinced of the folly and wickedness of their arts, made public confession and burnt their books of

divination and mystic charms; 4. Such a marked diminution of the zeal and numbers of the worshipers of Diana as to excite general alarm that her temple would be despised; 5. A large and flourishing church was there established.'" Not only did he thus labor, but he also contended and suffered in a way which he significantly describes: "I have fought with beasts at Ephesus." Then it should not be forgotten that in the midst of all these toils and endurances he wrote several of those epistles which have aided so much in establishing the Church of God upon earth. There he penned the letters to the Galatians, to Timothy, to Titus, and the first to the Corinthians.

Next to the work of Paul in planting this important church comes that of John, who, as we believe, spent even more of his years among these first believers of Ephesus. Only in God's book of remembrance is to be found the history of what he did and suffered in the cause of the heavenly Lord whom he loved so dearly. Enough is on authentic record to make it a terrible certainty that he endured a shocking baptism similar to that of his Master. Certain it is that, an aged and persecuted man, he was banished to pine as a bound prisoner in the mines or quarries of Patmos. In Ephesus he toiled as well as suffered. Through many years he labored on to build up the Church on apostolic authority. Besides, what heavenly words was he inspired to write in that city of his adoption! Here, no doubt, it was that he penned the gospel history, and those three epistles, the very soul of heavenly love, and the Apocalypse, whose teachings must have originated hard by the everlasting throne. His whole life became a lesson, for just such a lofty and loving example as his was needed to show, in living form, the principles and doctrines of the gospel which was there planted. The love of that gospel was best understood when all its charms were seen in him. There is no doubt but this disciple whom Jesus loved rendered a service which all the world should prize in nurturing this first great Church on purely pagan ground, which would of necessity become a model for all other churches that might follow. In the bosom of that Ephesian church he lived, loved, set an example of righteousness, labored, suffered, died, and was probably buried. Nor were his services forgotten; for, long after he fell asleep in Jesus, the emperor Justinian, with marble taken from the ruins of Diana's temple, built a splendid church to his memory. To this day is his name perpetuated there, in the only residences where Ephesus once stood, known as Ayasaluk, "the holy theologian."

Timothy also rendered his services in laying the foundations of this Ephesian church. That, as pupil and attendant on Paul, he visited Ephesus occasionally, and preached there, is tolerably certain. It is also probable that, according to tradition, he was sent there, and even stationed for a long time, to correct errors, guard against enemies, and so continue the work which Paul had commenced. It is also quite probable that in that field of his labors he died a martyr's death and was buried in ground which the resurrection will show to have contained the ashes of many eminent saints of the Lord.

Still other faithful workmen were engaged in establishing that church connected with which were so many great interests of the kingdom. Among these we find Aquila and Priscilla, that Jewish couple who for their faith were banished from Rome, and who in Ephesus, where at that time hospitality was so much needed, kept open house for the entertainment of those whom God sent to help the great enterprise. There too was Apollos, the eloquent Alexandrian, who, through his thorough knowledge of the Scriptures, his skill in the principles of the gospel, and his fervor of spirit, was able to render effective service in teaching the things of the Lord and preaching in the synagogue. Another eminent worker also was Tychicus, a faithful man whom Paul dearly loved, and who aided the cause by the comforting words and cheering remembrances he brought to the struggling church. Paul and John and Timothy, Aquila and Priscilla, Apollos and Tychicus,—is it to be wondered at that under the ministrations of such noble spirits as these the church should become strong in faith and graces and numbers?

From all these and other things the church at first did progress rapidly, and soon exerted a wide and deep influence. The evidences of its strength are seen in many intimations of Scripture which we will do well to notice. The following recorded things show how strong it was: It had an intelligent body of elders, who, according to his appointment, met Paul at Miletus to hold a parting conference. It must have been a church of more than ordinary maturity of faith and holiness to have required and to have appreciated such a profound exhibition of truth as that contained in Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians. The number of professed Christians in that city and the depth to which the gospel had penetrated must have been very great to have caused the alarm of the silversmiths that their business of shrine-making would be destroyed by such multitudes leaving the worship of

Diana and going over to Christianity. So, too, it is evident that there must have been vast numbers of believers in Christ, and many of them must have been persons of influence, since amidst the leading officers of the city there were those who strove to shield Paul from the violence of the mob raging in the theatre. In the same way, the deep hold which the truth had taken may be inferred from the fact that even those who had been leading necromancers were induced to come forward and burn their books of magic. All these things—an intelligent body of elders, an epistle containing some of the most profound truths of religion, a spread of Christianity that was crippling the worship of idols, officers of the highest rank taking the side of the servants of God, and costly books of magic thrown into the flames —show that the influence of that church had penetrated the whole mass of society.

### 2. MISSION OF THE CHURCH OF EPHESUS.

A comprehensive glance at the glories which cluster around this church will show that in the grace and providence of God it was manifestly intended for a most important mission in the great movements of the kingdom of Christ on earth. To the Ephesian church was the first of the seven messages sent, and in it dwelt the highly-favored prophet who had received them all. In Ephesus was the scene of the most earnest, protracted, and successful labors of him who was pre-eminently the "apostle of the Gentiles," and others of the most devoted early Christians. In that city dwelt many of the most godly and honored of the first converts from paganism to the faith of the gospel. Here it was that the largest body and the last named of the disciples of John the Baptist were found and raised up to higher consecration to the work for which the Baptist prepared the way and Christ died. In this honored city a large part of the New Testament was written, as we know that at least one-third of its books were penned within its walls, while one was addressed to its Christian inhabitants. Out of it went the influence, the result of which was "that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the words of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks." Its name will for ever be connected with that first and greatest church which the Lord raised up in the very heart of paganism to send the light of gospel glory out over all the nations of the world and down through all the ages of time. Well may we always think of that church and city with admiration, for there were the very

doctrines, customs, principles, privileges, rules, and means of grace and blessings which we enjoy and practice to the present time established, defined, and employed to the glory of our divine King and to the comfort of every soul that is brought into the kingdom.

Such was the church of Ephesus. It stood at the head of the seven, the messages to which were to be the beacon of the ages. Its mission was to be most influential in all the subsequent movements of the kingdom. These facts and the calling of this church must be well understood in order that we may have the proper key to the messages.

### 3. CENTRAL POINT.

The message to the church of Ephesus, or to any of the other churches, is a single, definite thing which God would communicate to that special people. In order that the passage may be the more clearly understood, we call that its central point or thought. It is the burden of the message, the main thing intended by it. Everything else, no matter how complex, clusters around it. All else is dependent on it and receives from it its peculiar character. That one thing is what God would convey to that church. Were it not for that, the message would not have been written. In its study the first thing is to define as clearly as may be what that central point is.

In this message the central point undoubtedly is, "*Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.*" To this church God says: "I have this, which is everything, against thee—thou hast left thy first love." The charge is not that they had lost *all* their love to him, but that their *first* love was gone. This charge was the message to the church of Ephesus. This was the substance of the message, as if there were not another word. From an allusion contained in another portion of Scripture we are informed that this first love was very great. To this church it was written: "Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto the saints, cease not to give thanks for you." It would seem that such love as theirs could never wax cold.

This—"thou hast left thy first love"—was the central point, and everything else was ranged around and centred in that. It is more than merely interesting to study how this was surely the case: it is most profitable. "Thou hast left thy first love." Then around it we find that God noticed and affectionately re-

buked their fall; that they are praised for even that first love; that the sin and consequent evils into which that fall led were very great; that they are blamed by the exposure of their sad declension from such a state; that they are counseled as to how they may get back to their first love; that they are threatened with a sore calamity if they do not repent of their fall; that a blessed promise is made them in case they make an honest effort to return; and that there is a summons for the whole world to give heed to the danger of the cooling of such love. Thus every point of the message springs from this one which is the centre of all.

"Thou hast left thy first love." At first sight this appears to be only a small charge, but expanded to its full extent and consequences, and considered as it lies before the God of infinite love, it is enormous. As it lies before him this would be its expression: "This is my one charge against thee. It is the one message I send thee. Above all things I want thee to consider this. Thou hast left that first love which was so warm at the beginning. Why didst thou not cling to that first love? Why hast thou become so cold?"

This loss of their first love was a great sin. It was a sad thing that such a highly favored church should be so ungrateful. The fervent spirit of the affectionate disciple John should have prevailed in that church in the midst of which he had lived and loved and preached; but, alas! even there was it that the love was grown cold. How sad the change since that first love was kindled by God himself, inasmuch as Ephesus was a church so highly favored, inasmuch as such decline in affection was sure to grow worse and worse, and inasmuch as the evil example would spread through all the churches around!

So serious was the evil that it called forth this special message from the throne of God. We see that this decline in affection was specially noticed by him who is the Church's great Head. Never for a moment should it be imagined by us that God is indifferent as to the state of our feelings toward him. Our Lord is acutely alive to them. Most deeply significant is it here that the title of the Son of man in this message is, "He who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks." He was especially present in the midst of the Ephesian church, noticing all that it was or did. This leaving its first love was what arrested his particular attention. The love of his Church for him was very precious in his sight, as we know from what he had said of

another church: "I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown." Thus felt he concerning the first love of the Ephesian Christians; but he saw clearly that its first ardor was no more. He saw it, and it went to his heart. His complaint was: "I know that love has cooled, and I feel it. I rejoiced in that first love; but now how great the change!"

How significant that this charge concerning the loss of the first love should be the first of the seven messages! Does it not show how serious is that sin in the sight of God? Does it not tell of the folly, the guilt, and the danger of such a fall?

It is a sad fall; but, alas! it is mournfully common. Who of us has not seen many instances thereof? We have seen it in the young convert. At first his love to God, to the brethren, and to the cause of Christ was intense and hopeful. To him the Son of God was altogether lovely. He could find no language strong enough by which to express the ardor of his feelings. His soul went out in the joyous cry concerning Christ: "Thou art fairer than the children of men; grace is poured into thy lips: therefore God hath blessed thee for ever." Nothing was too much for him to do for that cause which was so new and so glorious in his sight. Why had he not long ago seen this surpassing loveliness of Christ? What could he do to make all men feel as he did concerning the wonders of salvation? Surely he never would, never could, lose the greatness of his wonder, love, and adoration of the ever-blessed Jesus!

But days, weeks, months pass, and a sad change has come. Where now that first affection? No longer are his language and feelings so ardent. What now do we hear from him? Such strong feelings as he once expressed are but enthusiasm. The service which he renders is all from a sense of duty. Duties are now neglected; the heart is cold, the first love is gone. Young convert, thou hast left thy first love! Alas, how thou hast fallen!

Thus too is it often with churches and blessed religious movements. How often has it followed precious revivals that the expectations at first excited have been disappointed! Individual Christians often lose much of their first love. Churches remit the ardor of their first affection. One has only to look at Germany, at Switzerland, at various parts of the Reformed Church elsewhere, at many an individual church, to see that what occurred

at Ephesus has often occurred elsewhere. Is not this the explanation of why so many of the old churches, which were once prosperous and useful, are now deserted and a mortal waste?

This evil of forsaking its first love by the church of Ephesus should receive special attention from every lover of the Zion of our God. It was evidently designed to be a solemn warning by the all-wise Spirit of inspiration. We may see this from the fact that the Son of man placed this the first of the seven messages which he sent to the churches. We may learn it impressively in that it is made the central point in this communication. It should be fixed most deeply by the admonitory words from the lips of the Redeemer: "He that hath an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." It should be branded in upon the conscience of every church of the Lord Jesus as an awful warning, with its dread execution when the candlestick and all its glories were taken away from that church, and it was left an utter and mournful desolation. Especially should it evermore be carried with us for our admonition and guidance, since its lesson is pressed home with so much solemnity by the divine Master who dwells in the midst of his Church and holds her ministry in his right hand.

### 4. EVILS RESULTING.

The Ephesian Christians left their first love, and, in consequence, immediately afterward we find the most serious evils of various kinds beginning to show themselves. This becomes a deeply significant fact. Let it be remembered that the burden of the message is, "*I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.*" What was the connection between the cooling of the love and the evils which then appeared in the church? How did this leaving of their first love result in the great corruptions in both their doctrines and their practice? That it was so we have abundant assurance by both inspired and other writers. The love of God cooled in their hearts, and then the way was open for the entrance of other loves and for evils of every kind to creep in. It is always so when the first ardor of the believer cools. The whole history of churches is full of examples that ceremonies more or less mischievous have come in just as piety has died out.

The deplorable fact declared concerning this Ephesian church was that it had already become contaminated by the deeds and doctrines of the Nicolaitans. Into the question of who the Nico-

laitans were we need not now enter. For our purpose it is sufficient to know what were their general practice and teachings.

The essential error of these first sectaries, and of all others who affiliated with them, was that they perverted the blessed truth of the gospel—"Ye are not under the law, but under grace"—into a most abominable liberty. To this they gave the gross interpretation that, because believers are not under the law, they are above the law; that the law does not bind them; that what would otherwise be transgression is no transgression in them. The result of such perversion of most precious truth was that they "turned the grace of God into lasciviousness." Not being under the law, they promised themselves liberty, and so became corrupt, and their corruption took the form of lewdness and procured for them the sad description of the inspired pen: "They allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage."

Their deadly error culminated in the gross practice the type of which was in their indulgence of *a community of wives*. Clemens of Alexandria, as quoted by Eusebius, speaks of the Nicolaitans as a people who practiced a community of wives, living in fornication and adultery. They were the Antinomians of that day. This tells the whole story. Besides, their lewdness was associated with the invariable accompaniment of sharing in the heathen orgies at their idol love-feasts. No wonder that the apostle calls such doctrines, with the practice to which they led, "damnable heresies," or that another inspired writer describes them as "spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds: trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, plucked up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever." In this way it came to pass, and is made most evident, that the very core of the sin of the Nicolaitans was their immorality. "They taught the most impure doctrines and followed the most impure practices." "They taught the community of wives, that adultery and fornication were things indifferent, that eating meats offered to idols was quite lawful; and mixed pagan rites with the Christian ceremonies." All this they were in practice as well as in doctrine, and they were necessarily idolaters in their beliefs and habits.

This great evil, which first showed itself in the church of Ephesus, was most portentous. Taken in connection with many other such instances and with many inspired declarations, it established a dreadful fact, to which the whole Church should give the most earnest heed. That fact is that *the prime, great, mournful fall from first excellence in almost all erring churches is into sins of immorality.* Almost the whole history of recreant churches forces this truth upon us. Lust is the demon who makes the first fatal onslaught upon the comparative purity of first zeal. In our own time we have many deplorable types of this to which we dare not close our eyes. Perhaps this can be explained—though explained only to be condemned. Ephesus gives the typical example which showed the sad reason. That church left its first love, and immediately afterward we find in it the impure Nicolaitans. The immorality may have been either the effect or the cause of the cooling of the first ardor. Supreme love to the Master departs, and then corrupt love of the creature enters in its place. This may have been the cause; or it may be that, the libidinous feeling being admitted, the first love is then forced out by "the expulsive power of a new affection." Either of these may have been the cause; or more likely both were united in the sad fact, so often seen, that the first great, grievous error in both doctrine and practice is *immorality* in some of its always gross forms. This is the reason why it is a fact, so deplorable, that in churches the first downward step in *antinomianism is that of turning "the grace of God into lasciviousness."* It is the perversion of love, the crowning grace. Love to God, which is such an exalted feeling, is corrupted into a gross love of the carnal and the unclean.

### 5. ATTRIBUTE HERE USED.

In order that the great evil involved in this course of the Ephesian church when it left its first love may be duly appreciated, it must be looked at as ingratitude toward Him who "*walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks*," and "*who holdeth the seven stars in his right hand.*" Were he at a distance from his people and indifferent to their interests, the case would not be one of such magnitude. Inasmuch, however, as he is alive to all their concerns and loves them so dearly, this treatment from them becomes most culpable.

He is in the midst of the golden candlesticks—in the midst of the Church. The supreme management of men and angels,

of empires and worlds, all rests in his hands, yet he gives special heed to the Church, which he has chosen as his peculiar home and residence.

As it was with the Shechinah in the tabernacle and temple, so is it that he dwells in the Church and from it manifests himself to his creatures. His Church is under his peculiar control and management. From her, as from a centre, he issues his mandates to mankind, to angels, to worlds, to the universe. In her midst he makes his home, as in his glorious resting-place and the abode of his divine comfort.

In his Church, with his people, are the warmest affections of his heart. With her is the strongest and most inalienable attachment, as he is careful to impress upon every one who loves him, at one time declaring that his people are as "the signet upon his right hand," at another that he "has engraven them upon the palms of his hands," at another that he "keeps them as the apple of his eye," and at another still that he "hides them under the shadow of his wings;" and still other warmest engagements does he make toward them. In this home of his dearest affections he opens his whole heart in confiding love to his blood-bought friends. In his Church he is loved the most and makes the clearest manifestations of his divine affection.

There, too, he is careful to manifest that he is keenly alive to every real interest of his people whose hearts are with him in his cause. He watches over such interests with unwearied care. He walks in the midst of the golden candlesticks. With unerring wisdom and skill he arranges all things with reference to his Church's highest welfare. He is intensely alive to every movement that is connected with her prosperity. The love of his people toward him is the delight of his soul. Unkindness from them goes to his heart. Hence the sin of his Church when her first love waxed cold was grievous to her loving Lord. The heart of his Church, and of each one of her members, is the possession which, of all others, he loves the best. On the other hand, the withdrawing of that love or allowing it to grow cold wounds him even in the house of his friends. Most significant is it, therefore, that, connected with this special message to the church of Ephesus, our Lord uses of himself the attributes "walking in the midst of the candlesticks" and "holding the stars in his right hand." It is that dear, loving, deeply interested Lord toward whom the first love has grown cold. That heart, that divine heart, which was so tender and loving and true, was

grieved by the increasing indifference of the friends whom he had cherished so dearly.

### 6. COMMENDATIONS.

Already have we seen that, in the most tender consideration, the Lord of the churches inserts some words of approval in the messages he sends them. He remembers their trials and frailties, and encourages them by specially noting in them whatever was worthy of approval. To this church of Ephesus such commendations are very strong. For their good works, their patient endurance of toils and opposition, their dislike of evil in its varied forms, and their fidelity to the cause of righteousness, he gives them such words of praise as must have been to them most cheering amid all they had to endure.

He kindly assured them that he did not stand aloof from them in cold indifference, but that, moving in their midst and looking upon them with a longing eye, he noticed every one of their good and loyal acts. He praised them in that they were not content with mere purposes, intentions, and resolutions, but that their hands were continually filled with works of benevolence and piety. They toiled earnestly in the cause which was dearest of all things to the heart of Jesus. No common work, either, would do in that city so full of heathen corruption and ungodliness. Moreover, they were sorely tried by insidious heresies that were more dangerous than open paganism. The opposition of professed but hypocritical brethren was the worst of all. A most devoted people did the Master proclaim them, since they busied themselves in these trying works, as well as in keeping their own piety in a healthy state amid such an uncongenial atmosphere. Upon all this the eye of their Lord rested approvingly, and that with all the more loving regard as he saw that they labored thus diligently not for their own interest merely, but according to his words of praise: "For my name's sake."

He saw too, and approved, and made special mention of the fact, that this severe and continued toil required patience—patience to persevere in work which required so much self-denial, and patience to preserve the meek spirit of Jesus amid such unjust and cruel treatment. They had trouble from the wearing efforts the cause required; from the persecutions of a degraded population without heart or feeling; and, worst of all, from the wounds inflicted daily in the house of friends. What a spirit of endurance did all this require and exhibit! It was a spirit sorely needed in

that city of dark, debased, idolatrous wickedness. But it existed, and was noted by the loving Lord of the Church. The Glorious One in the midst of the candlesticks applauded it and embalmed it in everlasting remembrance.

Not only their works of piety, but also their very thoughts and feelings, were noted and commended by the all-gracious Son of God, whose heart is so tender toward all those who are with him in purpose and effort. "Thou canst not bear them which are evil," are the considerate words by which he further shows his approbation. What marvelous tenderness that he who is so transcendently great as by his omniscience to see into the deepest feelings of the soul should make that soul glad by expressing his approval! What a testimony, moreover, is this to the depth of the piety of those Ephesians, seeing that they could not even bear the sight of sin, and evil was odious before them, no matter how loud the profession or how high the claims of spiritual attainments!

These Christians of Ephesus whom the Son of God so warmly commends must have had more intense zeal than we have ordinarily supposed. It was so genuine and so strong that they would not allow to continue among them pretenders who made high claims of spiritual gifts—even the claim of being apostles. As is so often the case, even in that church, whose piety was so warm and true, there appeared false apostles and seducers who put forth the highest pretences. These pretended apostles the faithful Ephesians would not suffer to remain among them to disseminate their pestilent heresies. Neither would they arbitrarily expel them. On the contrary, they tested their claims to be apostles. They tried their teachings by comparing them with the truths of the real apostles and of the Lord himself. They proved them by their actions, carefully examining whether they were the fruits of true godliness.

The commendatory message from Him whose all-seeing eye rested lovingly upon them was: "Thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars." This was very high praise as coming from the lips of their Lord. It also reveals the great sacrifice this sifting process must have cost the youthful and inexperienced church. Perhaps some of those found hypocrites had been special friends; perhaps they had held posts of influence. No doubt their trial and expulsion was a heavy blow to the faithful band, surrounded by enemies who would turn the event into a damaging scandal by exagger-

ated and cruel railings. Still they were faithful and would not be driven from the post of duty.

But why are these things on record to the praise of the church of Ephesus? Why do they find a place in the messages to the seven churches, and still more in the great book of Revelation for the world? We cannot help wondering at the minuteness with which the glorious Lord of Zion presents every commendable thing in this one youthful church. We are made to see concerning that church God's loving regard of its interests, its eminent works of piety, its patience in toil and danger, its loyalty to the Master's name, its detestation of whatever is wrong and evil, and its fidelity to what is true and right. It is not in vain that all these are made to pass before us, for then the object of the special message to that church, "Thou hast left thy first love," becomes more sadly conspicuous. Then, in addition to this chief design of the commendations, we also carry away from them the stimulating assurance that all our efforts in the gospel cause are made under the loving eye of the heavenly Master, and the encouraging prospect that he approves now, and will applaud before the grandest audience the universe will ever see, in the words, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant."

### 7. COUNSEL FROM GOD.

What should a people do that have lost their first love, and whom the Spirit and providence of God have led to see their condition? Worldly or partially sanctified wisdom may suggest many a remedy, such as advising with friends who have more experience, or associating with those whose hearts are warmer, or breaking away resolutely from the chilling influences which are paralyzing, or striving earnestly after the lost affections whose want is so deeply felt. This is all very well for the wisdom of the world; but what saith the wisdom that cometh down from on high, and that, consequently, never makes a mistake or leads astray? What is its counsel? What saith He who made the heart of man, and who therefore knows the nature of all its affections, its leanings, its springs, all the ways by which it may be influenced, all its temptations, all the obstacles in the way of its rising toward God, and who, with more than human compassion, yearns over every erring and sin-beset follower? What saith He upon whose every counsel the soul may be safely rested? What is his advice?

Not, probably, that which we would have looked for. The church of Ephesus, in which there had been so much to com-

mend, had left its first love, and we would have expected him to urge a renewal of that first affection. Not so, however, did he reason with them. On the contrary, he presses upon them to remember, to repent, to do; to do their first works—not to *feel*, but to *do*. In this counsel there were three important elements: to remember, to repent, and to do the first works. There is nothing here about awakening or renewing the first love; there is nothing about feeling: it is all doing. How significant this as a personal experience! The love we would have to our Lord is never to be reached by a direct effort therefor. It is not by striving to feel that we attain to the proper affections, but by the performance of the duty enjoined. This is an important point to be kept in mind. The command here to the fallen Ephesians is not "Feel your first love," but it is "*Remember*, *repent*, *do*." This advice is founded upon the nature of the human mind and of sin and temptation, but especially has it come down from the throne of supreme wisdom and authority. Most deeply, therefore, should it be pondered by every soul that would rise to first, or even to far higher, spiritual attainments.

"Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen:" this is the first step for the returning church or for the individual backslider. It was the course of the returning prodigal of the parable. He remembered—very deep and painful were his recollections—"How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger." So was it enjoined on this church whose first love was gone. Its course was to remember the heights of grace to which it had once attained—to remember how it had once walked with its Lord in loving communion and confidence—to remember when and where it had first attained to that rapture of affection which was gone,—to remember thus, so as to kindle anew the desire of the same blessed heights. Remember, oh, remember—it is the advice of your Lord—how thou hast fallen, if not to the same degree, in the same manner as the sad fall deplored on the sacred page: "How art thou fallen from heaven!"

"Remember" is the first step, and then the second enjoined will follow—"*Repent*." In this, too, the prodigal in the parable is our example—"He came to himself." "Repent"—remembrance leads to godly sorrow. The penitent lamentation of the soul or of the church then becomes, "What have I lost? What might I have been? What a kind, patient, loving Father have I grieved! It well becomes me, and I do abhor myself in dust and ashes, that

I have fallen so low. How can I humble myself low enough before that tender Lord whose heart I have wounded? Oh, how deeply I mourn that I have shown such ingratitude toward him, even in the house of his friends!"

The third and final step is, "Do the first works." Remember, repent, and then do. Of course, faith is at the root of all, but this is the practical, palpable course that must be taken. "Do the first works" is the climax of the recommendation as it was given by that heavenly wisdom that cannot err. This is the most valuable rule ever laid down for a penitent backslider as a method of getting back to the heights of first glowing affection. It should be repeatedly impressed that the counsel given is to *do the first works*, and not to *feel the first feeling*. The feelings cannot be excited; the doing may be reached. The old affection will not come back at our will, but to do may be in our power. "It is possible, though there is no virtue without faith, to gain faith by virtue." It was in the power, as it was the duty, of the fallen Ephesian Christians to do their first useful, faithful, and patient works—the very works which their Lord had approved, and then on them, while so doing, would come down the divine blessing and the old ardent love.

This point is unspeakably important and valuable. We want a revival of first, or even stronger, love in our churches. How are we to gain that desirable blessing? Here is the method as God himself has ordained it: no new contrivance or doubtful experiment, but simply to do as has been done before, but with renewed and earnest fidelity. No matter what is said or thought or meant by the idea of good works, here is God's own plan for securing a true revival. Let every individual believer, as well as the whole Church united, heed this. A more momentous, practical thing for promoting the salvation of souls and the upbuilding of Christ's cause there could not be. The course we are to take in order to reach these blessings, needed above all others, is put in a plain and practicable form. It could not be made more simple and easy. It is just as available for one church, or any church or the whole Church, as it was for the Ephesians. The principles involved are the same. The elements are the same in every respect. The blessings aimed at, the course to be pursued, and the divine counsel are all alike, though the time and the people are widely separated. Blessed are we that we have such directions from the lips of the all-perfect Lord himself, and that he is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever"!

8. MENACE.

There was a great crisis in the condition of this mother-church of the seven. As a church it had left the first ardor of its love to God, was sorely tempted by pretended apostles, was plied by the seductions of the Nicolaitans, and so was on the way to utter apostasy. In this emergency a voice came to its members from the heavenly Master, appealing to them to remember, to repent, and to turn to their first faithful works, at the same time offering them the alternative of spiritual joy and prosperity should they pause on their fatal descent, or of the removal from them of their highest privileges if they should go on in their coldness of heart. The choice was offered them with all frankness. Repent, and their first love, with many additional blessings, would be secured them; continue in their sinful process of cooling, and all their priceless privileges would be given to others. In offering them their choice God was perfectly sincere. He was in earnest with them, and one or the other course they must take. If they would not heed him, then their love, their blessings, and their glory must go elsewhere. The candlestick, with its light, life, and blessings immortal, would be removed. The alternative was honestly but solemnly laid before them. Most momentous was the choice on which their all was suspended, and they could not escape.

The immediate effect is not on record. There is a tradition that for a brief season they did heed, and rise partially from their fallen state. Even this, however, is not certain. There is not the least evidence that the church of Ephesus did repent, and the threatening has been most signally fulfilled. Long since, the church has become utterly extinct, and for ages there was not a single professing Christian in Ephesus. Every memorial of there having been a church there has departed, and there are nowhere, not even in Nineveh, Babylon, or Tyre, more affecting demonstrations of the fulfillment of ancient prophecy than in the present state of the ruins of Ephesus.

The precise form of the warning words, "I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place," requires to be more fully considered. Its meaning is, not that the candlestick or light of the church would be extinguished, but that, with all its benefits, it should be removed elsewhere, and leave darkness and desolation behind. The light would not be obliterated, but taken away and made to illuminate other regions. Was there some connection between this form of the threatening and the

scene sculptured on the Arch of Titus, where the sad procession of captive Jews is beheld bearing away the golden candlestick from its first location amid the people of God? Certain it is that there is a striking similarity between the form of the threatened judgment and the sculptured scene. The candlestick was removed: Ephesus is dark and desolate, while the light shines on other favored lands. The light was removed from Ephesus, and that city was left dark, dead, cheerless. As the candlestick was removed, the usual process of decay began, and it has continued until that once great church and city have become venerable only for their ruins. Their doom was a fearful one. The church would not return to its first love, but went on in its downward career, and then it was as if God had proclaimed to it in awful accents, "I will remove thy candlestick, and will deprive thee of gospel light, of Bibles which thou hast not read, of Sabbaths thou hast not kept, of ministers thou hast not heard, of communions thou hast not observed, and of liberty thou hast not valued, but abused." In this way the eternal decree of God—"The gates of hell shall not prevail against" my Church—was made good, even while that city was left desolate, as if neither church nor Scriptures nor ordinances had ever been there.

In this language by which the doom of the Ephesian church was announced there is an expression which demands special attention: it is the word "quickly." It is one of those comprehensive expressions, sometimes occurring in Scripture, which covers a large field of kindred thought, all of which it makes the more impressive. It imports that the threatened judgment would come suddenly, unexpectedly, when men were not looking for it, as when, in the third century, the Gauls invaded the city, and in their wild rage laid the temple of Diana in ruins. Again, the doom would come "quickly;" for, even though centuries might first pass away amid the arrangements of the divine dispensation, the time would not be long. Again, the coming of the fearful visitation would be "quickly" when the time would be measured by the ages of Jehovah, with whom "one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day," and so its alarms would be as the morrow. Still further, the threatened calamities would come "quickly" in the strict and literal sense, for even then the hand of God was beginning to be bared in letting loose upon the unfaithful church the persecutions and other evils that crushed thicker and heavier until it was no more. In all these aspects the menace which the Ephesians would not heed

was made the more terrible by the certainty that it would not be delayed and could not be averted.

All was exactly and fully accomplished according to the warning from heaven from which the infatuated church turned away in disregard. The ardor of first affection became cooled; the warning words were uttered in order to arrest them on their downward course, but were not heeded. They went on in their fatal descent. Errors and corruptions crept in amongst them, and their apostasy continued with accelerated rapidity. Judgments from the hand of God, and disasters most appalling, made it manifest that church and city were descending to inevitable destruction. The warnings which God had given were beginning to be realized in the persecutions of the Roman emperors Decius, Gallus, and Valerian. The devastations were completed by Saracens and Turks. The fatal downward course was well described by another: "In the eleventh century Ephesus was captured and razed to the ground by the Turks, and its present condition is a strange and startling contrast to its ancient pride of place. The sea has receded from its original margin; what was once a busy harbor is now a dreary and desolate marsh, and the former extent of the city can be traced only by a solitary watch-tower and some fragments of masonry on the grassy hill. Part of its site is now a ploughed field. When night descends, the mournful cry of the jackal resounds where formerly arose the hum of men, and the night-hawk and the owl haunt the scanty memorials of departed greatness. Of its temple of Diana not a trace is extant. There remain, indeed, considerable ruins of the theatre which was connected with so memorable an event in Paul's history. A miserable Turkish village called Ayasaluk is also situated some distance inland; and these are all the signs the stranger can discover of the once splendid seat of pagan worship."

The doom from heaven was undeniably the ulterior cause of the overthrow of the renowned city and the disappearance of all its splendors. It was the execution of God's righteous sentence because of the people's apostasy and the consequent depravity into which they had fallen. We have already referred to the wrath of man as coming down upon them through the persecuting emperors, through merciless Saracens, and through the barbarous Turks; but besides these there were three other agencies which contributed to bring about its total overthrow. There was, first, as we have already stated, a strange blunder in engineering, which, intended to improve the channel of the river

Cayster as it entered the sea, in fact obstructed it more and caused an increased deposit of the sediment carried down by the current from the highlands of the interior, and so gradually formed a plain, miles in extent, which covered up streets, public buildings, and temples, and in time was turned into swamps first, and then into cultivated fields. A second cause had the same origin: it was the malaria arising from the swamps formed by the deposit, which rendered the neighborhood so unhealthy that the inhabitants gradually deserted an atmosphere the inhaling of which proved most fatal. The third agency was the barbarism which led to the despoiling of the splendid temple and other buildings, and the carrying away of masses of brass and marble and precious stones to be used in ornamenting the structures of other cities. The city harbor was accessible to every port around the Mediterranean, and vessels sailed from every quarter to be loaded with its choicest ornaments and to transport them to rising palaces, temples, and cathedrals, some of which are standing to the present day.

Through these and similar causes church, temple, and city have been reduced to a scene of utter ruin and desolation, and now form a lasting and impressive evidence of the authenticity of the revealed Word. In fact, the whole message, in connection with the evidence of the infliction of the threatened judgment, is a standing monument of the divine justice and verity. That Ephesus and Laodicea, the two cities against which there are the heaviest charges, should now be heaps of ruins, while Smyrna and Philadelphia, which are approved without a word of censure, should even to this day be populous and flourishing, are both indications of God's hand in the record which the most persistent scepticism cannot ignore. The desolations of Ephesus tell of the awful reality of the judgments which have been executed.

### 9. PRESENT DESOLATIONS.

Such is to-day the ruined and desolate condition of this city, once so renowned among the nations. Our regard for what it once was, for the momentous events of the ages with which it was connected, and for its strange history, excites our curiosity to know all that is within our reach of its present state. Let us accompany the traveler as he wanders through its huge and sometimes beautiful ruins.

We commence our ramble at what, in the day of its glory, was the entrance to the city, on the shore of the sea, but is now three miles in from the beach. Our face is toward the east, and behind

us the three miles of marsh or fruitful land which separates us from the waters of the Ægean. Around us spreads the morass which was once the harbor where many a proud galley of Greece and many a stately trireme of Rome once rode in beauty. We gain the spot where were the quay and the entrance of the city gate. Away to the right are the heights now crowned by the huge mass of the ruined modern fort, on climbing to which we pass the quarries, still dripping from hidden springs, and with marks of the old workmen who quarried the snow-white marble that gleamed in temples and palaces. Behind us, around us, and on all the plains which the eye can reach there are marshes or cultivated fields on which the crops of grain are waving beneath the breezes that sweep up from the sea. The swamps along the margins of the winding Cayster, and the muddy pools which had been scooped out by the tides, are filled with reeds and reeking with malaria. Yonder the river creeps lazily along toward the sea, in the same crooked path it has pursued since the days of Alexander and the Amazons.

We stray onward, still toward the east, over the course where in other days crowds entered the splendid city, and ascend the ruins of the stadium, or race-course, into which tens of thousands once gathered to witness the games, or as runners to press toward the goal, or as boxers to take part in the brutal contests, or as charioteers to lash the foaming steeds, or to partake in other of the pagan strifes. Close by us, on the declivity of the mountain, spreads out the space covered by the forum, on which, in imagination, we hear masterpieces of Grecian oratory once delivered where the silence of desolation now reigns supreme. We bend a little toward the right, or south, and come upon the ruins of the great theatre which was the scene of the turmoil about "Diana of the Ephesians." This theatre is the largest structure of the kind, save one, that has come down to us from all antiquity. How vividly comes up to our imagination the raging of the pagan mob as for two hours they cry out, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians! Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" We can almost see Paul struggling to tear himself away from his friends, that even to that raging crowd he may tell of Christ and him crucified.

Still climbing up eastward amid the ruins, through broken blocks of marble and crumbling walls and thickets of trees, we reach the summit of Mount Coressus and obtain a view of the half-buried ruins which extend on every hand. We look out from its summit

over the confused morass which was once the harbor where Aquila and Priscilla landed. We visit in its deep recesses the dripping marble-quarries, where the marks of the tools are still visible. Below is the agora, through which the mob rushed to the well-known place of meeting. Toward the right, we descend into a valley that sweeps around from west to east, on a ruin-covered space where was the market square, where the throng of buying and selling and the hum of business were so often heard. Down the declivity we stray, over the valley, then up the rocky slope of Mount Prion and to its summit covered with thickets, and we have reached the southern limit. Here we come upon a solitary watch-tower on the line of the great wall, whose course, over hills and valleys, by rivers and streams and bridges, marks the extent of the city and its grandeur in the day of its glory.

The eye sweeps north-eastward, and on one of the lower spurs of Prion is seen a shapeless mass of marble fragments where stood the Odeon, or temple of music, in which celebrated poets rehearsed their verses, and strains of music reverberated through the halls. A little beyond this, and up the slope of Prion, there is a solitary monument which has stood for centuries, marking, tradition says, the spot where rests the dust of Paul's companion, the beloved physician Luke. A close inspection of the outlines of the heaps upon heaps of fragments of marble strewn over the whole region discloses certain lines of streets converging to one important point at the extreme north-east. That point is no doubt where the temple of Diana stood, and these were the avenues leading to it from every part of the city. Immense modern excavations indicate the precincts of the structure, the first wonder of the world. The accumulating mud of centuries has buried it, so that it is now a scene of utter confusion; but it is the most impressive spot of all, and we wander over it almost in awe. Only a few yards farther still, and we come upon a cluster of hovels, constructed of mud and elegant fragments of marble, which contain a few dozens of people—all the population that remains of the once mighty Ephesus. Its name is Ayasaluk—a name that perpetuates the memory of the holy theologian, the disciple whom Jesus loved. That wretched village and those mysterious fragments are all that remain as witnesses of the folly of those who, by suffering their first love to wane, caused the light of God's candlestick to be removed from them for ever. We have reached the northern boundary of the ruined city; our feet are upon the heights of Castle Hill, from which one look westward toward the

sea reveals the pestilential marshes and the windings of the sluggish river. Another look southward, and the panorama of broken walls and arches, of confused hills and valleys, and of ruined temples, theatres, and palaces stretches on every side; another look toward the east, and we behold the strange spectacle of a road of iron stretching away into the distant landscape, and we hear a sound as it were struggling to wake up the centuries—that of the locomotive, whose screams are re-echoed from broken walls and tottering temples and confused hill-sides. The whole scene produces a jumble of sights and sounds, mingling the wonders of the past with the dreams of the future in a manner that urges us to fall down in gratitude that the management of all is in the hands of Him who is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."

### 10. THE CONQUERORS.

One of the many remarkable things which fix the attention in the study of these messages is that in each of them, in connection with a promise, is found the expression "him," or he, "that overcometh." The expression is too remarkable in itself, and too striking as a part of all the messages, not to have had a special purpose. As we come upon it here, for the first time, in this opening message, we shall consider it once for all.

That it was an element, and an important element, in the beacon of the ages becomes more and more obvious the more it is pondered —as it is also clearly an essential part of each message. The overcoming, of course, presupposes a contest; and, occurring in each message, it forewarns the whole Church that such scenes of contest might be expected as a feature in the career of the Church in all the future. If there would be victories, there would certainly first be contests. It is worthy of attention that, in an altogether different connection, this same Ephesian church is admonished of the necessity of being equipped for the spiritual war. There the call is: "Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand." This was to the Ephesians; but similar warnings are found in other parts of the divine Word. It is significantly intimated in such passages as: "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer;

*I have overcome the world;*" and, "I write unto you, young men, because *ye have overcome the wicked one;*" and, "Whatsoever is born of God *overcometh the world:* and this is the *victory that overcometh the world*, even our faith;" and still more frankly are we cautioned: "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." The sacred pages are filled with such warnings. The whole Church is admonished of coming contests.

All these are God's monition to Christians that before them there is a life of opposition as they pursue their heavenward course. They tell of struggles many and sore which they must encounter if they would walk worthy of the vocation wherewith they are called. The very enemies that must be encountered are named. The first strife is with the world, which is opposed to God as constantly and as bitterly as might be expected from a realm which is in open rebellion against the heavenly throne. The second strife is with the flesh, the description of which is that it is enmity itself against God. The third strife is with the devil, an enemy cunning, cruel, mighty, of whom God himself warns us that "as a roaring lion he walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."

Who, unassisted, could stand in contests with these? That these and similar foes do carry on a constant warfare with the cause and people of God we have terrible evidence on wellnigh every page of the Church's history. Their opposition is incessant and unbounded in its intensity. We read it in the annals of persecution bloody and remorseless. We see it in wanton assaults which have never failed to be made on the people of God in seasons of special religious awakening and progress. We cannot help seeing it this day in the cold-hearted efforts of infidelity to tear away from us all that is dear and hopeful and loving in our holy religion—and that without a cause. These are contests forced upon the people of God that can be seen; but how many and dreadful that mortal eye never saw and that a thoughtless world never imagined!

The beacon light flashes out over nations and ages, and the interpretation of this signal held out to all is—solemn, clear, glorious—"*We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.*" "*We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.*" In that matchless care which provides for our every want our loving Lord holds out from his heavenly throne the signal that warns of every struggle. In loving consideration he would thus notify his people of what they must expect in his service. He would set

up the beacon to warn of the coming storm. He gives to this feature of the Church's coming destiny a significant emphasis. His gracious design was that his people should not be taken by surprise when the time of contest came, but that, being warned, equipped, and expectant, they should be able to stand, to conquer, to be more than conquerors through Him that loved them. He holds out to his people exceeding great and precious promises —promises that are varied in character, and each of which is more precious than that which precedes it, but each of which is connected with their overcoming, and hence with a struggle that preceded. He notifies of the coming struggle, but always cheers by the assurance of victory. The warning of the contest is given through the assurance of the overcoming of all enemies, for which he would impart strength to his faithful servants. And the overcoming itself is the prelude to the most blessed reward of which heart can conceive. Hence duty, interest, Christian courage—every high and holy motive—summon us to be faithful in that good fight of faith. In the well-weighed words of Henry, the best of commentators, "The Christian life is a warfare against sin, Satan, the world, and the flesh. It is not enough that we engage in this warfare, but we must pursue it to the end; we must never yield to our spiritual enemies, but fight the good fight till we gain the victory, as all persevering Christians shall do; and the warfare and victory shall have a glorious triumph and reward. That which is here promised to the victors is that 'they shall eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.'"

### 11. TREE OF LIFE.

Such is the promise to the victors made in this gracious message from our Lord. He himself would give it, for he declares: "*I will give* to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God." He would depute no saint or angel for this welcome service, but would honor the victor by communicating it with his own hand. He would give it freely, not because the recipients had purchased it or merited it, but because he had purchased it for his faithful followers, and as the reward to them, he would bestow it. He, the divine Mediator, would bestow the blessing. There is meaning in it that Christ, the Captain of our salvation, would be the special benefactor, and not God the Father. Elsewhere it is declared that eternal life is the gift of God. Here, however, it is represented as coming from the Son, our Mediator, through whom and for whose sake the purchased blessing is be-

stowed upon those for whom his blood was shed. His death was life immortal to those who shall be saved by him. The gift, coming from his hands, tells of the price at which it was purchased, and gives assurance that never shall it be taken away from its recipients. Glorious thought! this priceless gift is from the all-honored Son of the Most High, our enthroned King!

"I will give *to eat* of the tree of life." This gift promised to the faithful Ephesian Christians is worthy of special attention, inasmuch as it has some features which are common to the gifts promised to all the other churches. This is chiefly observable in that in every case there is a similarity between the sacrifice made and the gift promised. The Ephesians proved their loyalty to their Lord by refusing to eat of the idol feasts, and hence the promise made them is that they would be permitted to eat of the tree of life. So dear to them was their Master, that for his sake they faced the scorn of men; then he would honor them by the first, the greatest, blessing secured by the sacrifice of his life for men. Most significant is it that this *first* gift that God engages to bestow on his faithful people was that which had been lost in the Fall. The Fall had closed the gates of Eden against the tree of life. That same tree is the first object that is offered when Christ has opened the gates by his sufferings unto death. All is conducted according to an eternal, all-glorious plan.

Moreover, those faithful believers denied themselves in the heathen feasts; now they are honored in the prospect of being admitted to the feast of God's paradise. The curse is removed, the flaming sword is taken away, the gates are flung open, and they are granted free access to that which is the beginning and fountain of all the pleasures which heart can desire. Sin shut them out from the favor of God; the death of Christ opened the way for them to return.

The tree of life is the promise here made; and what this was we may learn from contemplating that tree of Eden in all its beauty and fragrance and fruitfulness—the chief object in the garden of delights. We can form some idea of what that promise implied if we imagine how pure and wise and happy our first parents must have been before they were fatally tempted into the first dreadful sin. Had Adam not sinned, he would have been confirmed in perfect holiness and blessedness and wisdom. All that heart could desire would have been his. He would then have eaten of the tree of life which was in the midst of the garden, and this would have been his confirmation in his holy and

happy state. That confirmed original state of our first parents was an image of what was embraced in the promise of the tree of life; the glorious description in the closing scenes of Revelation is a sure promise of what God has in store for those who shall love him to the end. Without presumption or vanity may every faithful soul say of God: "He shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the *tree of life*, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations." The tree of life!—a faint image of it have we in the Eden of Adam's innocency; but it is beheld in its perfection in this vision of the beloved seer in Patmos. All this was embraced in the promise to the believers of Ephesus who should return to their first love and be true to their Lord amid the temptations and dangers which would surely come. They should be permitted to eat of the tree of life, and, as a result, should thereafter enjoy immortal vigor and eternal youth.

Still richer would be the blessedness in store for the faithful conquerors—even that of enjoying the tree of life in the midst of the paradise of God. Paradise!—this is a word borrowed from the delights of earth. It opens up to us parks of delight, gardens, pleasure-grouds, lovely in aspect, cultivated in beauty, and filled with whatever heart can desire. Every imagination with which it fills the soul is fraught with buoyant health and enchanting beauty and pleasure beyond the grasp of thought. All these images it is doubtless legitimate to use, in their full richness of thought, to describe what God has in store for the faithful victors. These are conceptions of paradise which come from the languages of earth; but the reality as asserted in the inspired Word is richer still. Even with all this aid we cannot fully imagine the blessedness of the paradise of God. Come there to us all sometimes dreams of youthful bliss, mystic visions of fresh morning brightness, meadows perfumed with dewy flowers, rapturous music of birds, companions spotless in affection and innocence, ethereal bliss in which the soul revels,—come there such transporting visions of youthful days as these? Even these come short of the reality, for "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."

# SMYRNA.

## THE QUEEN OF THE LEVANT.

## THE MESSAGE.

And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;

I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich,) and *I know* the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but *are* the synagogue of Satan.

Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast *some* of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.

# CHAPTER IX.

## THE QUEEN OF THE LEVANT.

### 1. SUBSTANCE OF THE MESSAGE.

THE central, comprehensive point of the message to the church of Smyrna is in these words: "Behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried." This is the one idea that pervades it all, giving full and faithful warning that the endurance of persecution would be a distinctive feature of the life of that church. The language of the message presents this alarming prospect with great vividness. The first word awakens to it the most solemn attention—"behold." This suffering would be an essential feature, a peculiarity of that church's life, as the time and the place and the form of the message all make most certain. Not only would they be persecuted, but bitterly, cruelly persecuted, for the great enemy would be the devil, the prince of all evil, who would exert his malignant power. The great providential design of the persecutions is clearly indicated. It would be to "try" them, and so to preserve their faith and to purify them. He "shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried." To purify and to strengthen, and not to destroy, was the ultimate aim in the plans of Him whose dominion is supreme.

This warning—"Behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried"—we must carry with us as the substance of the whole message. Everything bears upon this and is explained by it. It gives color and meaning to every other point. By carrying it with us we shall be able to settle the meaning and peculiarity of all.

The name, "the first and the last, which was dead and is alive," here given to the Son of God was significant because, all the relations of time standing before him, and he having been himself put to death by persecution, he could limit the wrath of the enemy as well as sympathize with his people in their sufferings. We can also see that he commended them for their past fidelity to him, and strengthened them for the trials which still lay before them;

that he nerved them for the coming struggles by the kind words, "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer," and by the promise that could not fail: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life;" and that he cheered them on by the stimulating hope that if they should bravely overcome, they would certainly not be hurt by the second death. Thus the whole message receives its character from this one central point. It is the key that unlocks its meaning and lets us into its richest arcana. The light which this message flashes forward over all the future makes it manifest that suffering for Christ's sake would be an invariable characteristic of the gospel's future course. It is a prophetic announcement of the solemn fact to which we cannot close our eyes—a fact of experience as well as of divine warning—that "The only method by which religious truth can be established in the world is by martyrdom." This is the substance of our message. With this key in our hands we proceed to attempt to open the various parts of this communication from the throne of God.

### 2. NOTABLE CITY.

In ancient times Smyrna was considered, in greatness, as the second city in proconsular Asia, Ephesus being the first. It was one of the eyes of that good land, the other being Ephesus. For at least two centuries it was regarded as the chief commercial city of the world. In all Ionia there was no city so rich and so beautiful as it was. So splendid was it among the habitations of mankind, that it was compared to myrrh, and bore that name —Smyrna. The various names given to it and the symbols used to describe it reveal the high estimation in which it was held at the time of its greatest prosperity. By the Turks, who were familiar with it even after it had somewhat declined from its original grandeur, it was called *Giaour Imir*—"Infidel Smyrna." This was their estimate of it, because of its steadfast adherence to the religion of Christ. The old Greeks, seeing it in its prime, termed it the "Crown of Ionia," because of its eminence above all other cities. To the Italians of subsequent days it was the "Flower of the Levant." Quite significantly, by French travelers of a still later day it was described as the "Miniature Paris of the East." Still more generally, because of its splendor, was it termed the "Ornament of Asia." By a yet more honorable class of admirers it bore the appellation of the "Martyr City," because with the best of its blood it had sealed its testimony for Christ and his salvation. "Infidel Smyrna," "Crown of Ionia," "Flower of the

Levant," "Paris of the East," "Ornament of Asia," "Martyr City,"—great and greatly renowned must have been the city which called forth such plaudits as these from so many lands and so many different peoples. This great esteem in which the city was held should be taken into account, for it served to give the greater weight to the message from heaven with which it stood associated.

The communication which was sent to such a city must have been one of vast importance. The whole world would receive with the more alacrity a charge which had first been sounded in the ears of a people so renowned. The extensive commercial intercourse of the city would carry the message over all lands. These words of the ascended Son of man were uttered not in a corner, but to a community large, intelligent, and influential. A city so renowned must have been one of extraordinary influence, and all that influence would go with the message it was the first to receive on its career of mercy throughout the nations.

Smyrna is mentioned in Scripture nowhere else than here, and even this solitariness would make the more impressive the mission for which it was intended. Mentioned but once, what traveler can behold it seated on the shore of the beautiful Ægean, with its splendid harbor, its smiling adjacent fields, and its noble overshadowing hills, and wonder that it should have received the honorable title of *the queen of the Levant?* "Ten times has the 'ornament of Asia' been laid waste by the torch of the invader, and ten times has she risen from her ashes, each time not less beautiful than before, till now she stands the undisputed *queen of the Levant*, an immense city, with its roofs glittering in the clear sunlight of the East, rising tier beyond tier from the shore to the bold hills behind, and a harbor crowded with the shipping of the Western nations, the flagstaffs of the foreign consuls along the shore, the minarets and cypresses in this meeting-place of many languages, creeds, and costumes, making us mindful of the changes which have occurred in this region since the martyrdom of Polycarp. And this consciousness of a new state of things culminates when we notice the railways which now connect Smyrna with the interior of the country."

### 3. LOCATION OF THE CITY.

There was no other city of its day so favorably located for the commerce of the world as this. Situated on the very best seaport of the whole Ægean, it had access to all the cities which lined the

coasts of the Mediterranean. An unobstructed pathway over that sea lay before the vessels that would reach it from Joppa, the harbor connecting with the holy city of Jerusalem; from Alexandria, into which emptied the treasures of the Nile; from Piræus, the entrance to the splendid gates of Athens; from Ostia, where crowded the ships that brought the riches of the world to Rome; from Massilia, or Marseilles, at that day the chief port of Gaul; from the mouths of the streams that lead up to Tarsus and Antioch and many other cities; from the islands of the Grecian Archipelago; from the Tuscan Sea; from the shores of Mauritania; from the pillars of Hercules; and from the Straits of Byzantium.

These were the sources of its commerce from the regions of the sea; but it also extended its trade on the other side, far inward over the plains and rivers and mountains of boundless fertility. It was the natural outlet for the produce of the valley of the Hermus as well as the adjacent lands. Vast caravans brought into it the grain, lumber, fruits, dyes, wines, metals, cattle, flax, and other articles which the fertile country produced in immense quantities.

All the activities of the city, political, religious, moral, and intellectual, sent back their influences to every town and country from which the material stores were gathered. From all these causes Smyrna was eminently the commercial city of antiquity. Neither Jerusalem, the earthly birthplace of Christianity, nor Rome, the capital of the empire of the civilized world, nor Athens, the splendid home of the earth's highest culture, nor Alexandria, the emporium of the riches of Egypt, nor even Ephesus, its sister capital of proconsular Asia, was in this respect the equal of Smyrna. A most stirring scene must that city have presented when at the summit of its greatness, attracting to its ports and gates ships from all countries, caravans from the banks of the Euphrates and the Tigris, merchants in every department of enterprise, adventurers and men of the greatest activity from Gaul, Britain, Italy, Galatia, Spain, and many other regions. Well was it called "the queen of the Levant," seeing it was the centre of the trade of all that region.

### 4. THE CITY IN ITS ANCIENT GRANDEUR.

The position of Smyrna with relation to the other cities of the Levant was such as to give it the best facilities for reaching them. From Byzantium, or Constantinople, destined to act so conspicuous a part in the fortunes of the world, it lay at the dis-

tance of one hundred and eighty-three miles; from Rhodes, standing out in the Mediterranean, at the south-west angle of Asia, it was one hundred miles; from Ephesus, the centre of some of the most important activities of the age, it was forty miles. Its own location, on the line where Asia touches upon the waters of Europe, at the head of the most magnificent bay and in the finest harbor in the world, gave it similar advantages. On the land side it was at the mouth of the stream Meles, and back of it stretched out an agricultural tract of surpassing excellence.

Its original site had wellnigh everything that could be desired. Its present position is a little to the north of where it anciently stood, it having been gradually removed in consequence of earthquakes which frequently shook its former foundations on the mountain-slopes. Standing as it does at the head of the gulf which indents the shore no less than thirty-seven miles, it was safe from the euroclydon or from any other tempest that could rage on the waters. On the land side the location was almost perfect: the little stream Meles brought into it a plentiful supply of water; immediately around it stretched a girdle of the most fertile fields; and back of them again arose mountains and higher lands which added to its beauty, sheltered it from inclement winds, and made it a little paradise of verdure and loveliness.

Within its walls there were equal charms. Its streets, running at right angles, were proverbially wide and finely paved, and on some of them, throughout their whole length, were magnificent colonnades, as if they were forests of marble trees of massive elegance. Here and there within its bounds there were great halls of art treasures containing pictures and statues brought thither from many distant lands. Palaces of surpassing magnificence were the homes of its merchant princes whose vessels were sweeping over every sea. There were splendid temples also, almost rivaling that of Diana at Ephesus or that of Æsculapius at Pergamos, which devout worshipers had erected as thank-offerings for the prosperity which had attended their city. Among the other magnificent public buildings were two the fame of which extended throughout Asia. One contained a vast public library, which in that age must have been a priceless treasure; the other was a great temple or Homerion with grand colonnades surrounding it, erected for the worship of the deified Homer, who was regarded as the tutelary divinity of that city of his birth. That Homer was born there was firmly believed by the inhabitants of Smyrna, and the very spot where he had composed his im-

mortal songs was pointed out close by a small spring on the bank of the Meles.

Most of these charms of Smyrna were the fruits of its commerce. From that came the skill that could devise and the wealth that could construct such broad and well-paved streets, such grove-like colonnades, and such magnificent palaces. In its prime it was the acknowledged model commercial city of the age.

### 5. HISTORY.

Smyrna stands peerless in the antiquity of its origin, while still it is in a flourishing condition to the present day. Damascus is an older city, but it is in a state of decay. Its origin lies back in the fabulous ages of the Amazons. According to the testimony of Strabo, it received its name from one of the Amazons who was called Smynia. From that uncertain age forward we know its fortunes with considerable accuracy. "The history of Smyrna," it has been truly said, "brings before us in epitome the story of the Greek race through all time, from the old fables of mythical tradition before Homer sang, through the epoch of Grecian supremacy in arts and arms, in science and letters, through the long and desperate struggles which ended in the final triumph of the Crescent over the Cross, to the less bloody but no less bitter strife of to-day, when the Crescent seems waning into annihilation, though the Cross as yet appears not ready to raise its symbol of supremacy and to take its place as the dominant creed of Asia."

There is no doubt that Smyrna was one of the most ancient colonies which the Ionian Greeks founded on the Asiatic side of the Ægean; probably it received a part of its first settlers from the still earlier colony of Ephesus. Some time about six hundred years before Christ, after a long and bloody struggle, the city was captured and finally reduced to ruins by the Libyans from the neighboring city of Sardis. In that condition of ruin it lay for about four centuries. After it was rebuilt the city flourished, and for a long time it shared the fortunes of the other Grecian, and afterward Roman, populations of the country. In the time of the Roman empire it had become one of the most prosperous cities of Asia Minor.

Such was its condition when this message was sent down to its church from the exalted Son of God. After that, though sorely persecuted, its church flourished for a long time. In the

early annals of Christianity it bore a conspicuous part. Two letters are extant which were written by Ignatius of Antioch to Polycarp and the church of Smyrna. The same venerable Father, bishop of Antioch, on his voyage to Rome touched at this city, and here suffered a martyr's death by being torn to pieces by wild beasts in the ampitheatre. This was in 108; in 166, Polycarp of Smyrna was cast into the flames by the same remorseless persecutors.

About eleven years later, or eighty-four years after this message to its church, the city was destroyed by an earthquake.

The subsequent history of Smyrna has been one of marvelous vicissitude: prosperity and adversity have followed each other with startling vividness. A synopsis of that history we quote from a most valuable writer: "Smyrna remained a portion of the Christian Greek empire later than most other parts of Asia Minor. It was first taken by the Turks A. D. 1084. Again it was taken and retaken, and on the second occasion the Turks massacred without mercy all the Christian inhabitants. It remained in ruins till the emperor Comnenus restored it about A. D. 1220. Again it was taken by the Turks, who were expelled after the Crusades by the Knights of Rhodes. Twice was it captured by them, to be speedily retaken; and the famous sultan Bajazet invested it in vain for seven years. At length Tamerlane with his Tartar hordes stormed it in A. D. 1402, after a siege of only fourteen days, and butchered all the inhabitants without mercy, building up into a tower with mortar the thousands of heads of the slaughtered Christians. Still the Knights of Rhodes made a last effort, and held it for a time. After their third expulsion by the Turks it was once more stormed by a Venetian fleet, when the Venetians visited on the Molsems with retributive fury the massacres which they had inflicted on the Christians. Since the abandonment of all attempts to expel the Ottomans the city has remained under Turkish rule, but with tolerable liberty for the Greek Christians, who enjoy freedom of worship, and are protected from much oppression, formerly by the existence of European factories, and now by the influence of Christian consuls and many Western residents." The one glorious record which this city can claim above all others is that her candlestick has never been removed. She has still retained some form of Christianity. At the present day, Christians by the names of Greeks and Armenians and others are found within her walls. Even in our own day our missionaries are organizing churches there.

### 6. CITY OF DEIFIED HOMER.

We have already seen that each of the seven cities of these churches was the metropolis or centre of the worship of one of the leading deities of paganism. The only uncertainty concerns Smyrna as the seat of the worship of the deified Homer. The circumstances, however, when closely investigated, scarcely leave any room for doubt. It is tolerably certain that Homer was born in Smyrna. It is true that six places besides—namely, Rhodes, Cyprus, Athens, Argos, Pylus, and Chio—each strove for the renown of having been his birthplace, but those who have examined the matter most thoroughly are wellnigh unanimous in giving the honor to Smyrna. The evidence as to his being deified and worshiped as a God in his native city is conclusive. The greatest temple in the city was erected in his honor, and his statue is the most revered shrine of the city.

No wonder that Homer should be deified by his native city of idol-worship as the author of the greatest heroic poems the world has ever seen—poems that have lived for twenty-eight centuries. No wonder that Smyrna, to which his birthplace honor belonged, should have rejoiced in it as her chief glory; that her grandest temple should have been erected for his worship; that enthroned in that temple should be his richest statue; and that idolatry should exalt him to the rank of a god, and establish Smyrna, the city of his birth, as the capital and centre of his worship. If there is more uncertainty concerning the special deity of Smyrna than concerning the other cities, it is doubtless owing to the fact that not letters nor worship nor culture of any kind was the life of that city, but commerce, trade—her caravans from inland mountains and plains, and ships from every region of the sea. Very much more highly did the inhabitants of that city esteem the fame of being the metropolis of the world's merchandise than that of being the metropolis of any system of worship.

### 7. PLANTING OF ITS CHURCH.

We have quite a full history of the introduction of Christianity into Ephesus, but very little of its beginning in the other six cities. It is not likely that there were any very remarkable incidents accompanying its first movements in them. We need not dwell specially upon any such history, inasmuch as the Word of God gives no particular information. It is probable that the general spread of the gospel over the whole country caused it to take root

in these several centres of population and influence. Two things doubtless contributed to the establishment of an influential church in Smyrna: it had a large Jewish population in that city, and its being a great commercial centre brought it within the influence of the new religion which was beginning to move the world.

There can hardly be a question but that this great city would be visited frequently by the apostle John, and more certainly still by Paul, whose footsteps we can trace through the neighboring towns as he went back and forth on the blessed mission to the Gentiles to which he had been appointed. When we read that through his labors "all they that dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks," it can hardly be that the greatest commercial city would be passed over. Through these agencies the gospel was early planted there.

### 8. CENTRAL POINT.

We are now prepared to consider that which was the central point, the substance, the great burden, of this message to the church of Smyrna. In our introductory remarks in this chapter we have already briefly stated what it is. We now take it up more distinctly and fully.

The words in which it is contained are, "Behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison." This was the substance of the message; it was also a prediction of what would afterward befall that people, and a description of what would be their leading characteristic. The church of Smyrna would be noted chiefly for its endurance of persecution: "Behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried"—this was a synopsis of the terrible destiny which was lying before that devoted people.

It was a terrible prospect that the conflicts which were before that church were to be, not against flesh and blood, but "against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." The devil would stir up wicked men against them. Satan, acting through human persecutors, would be the author of the sufferings they would have to endure. This intimation as to one of the secrets of the unseen world will explain the cruelties that have always accompanied the persecutions of the truth. Human depravity, of itself, would not prompt to such horrible barbarities as have so often been heaped upon those who were enduring martyrdom for the name of Jesus. No explanation of them is adequate,

short of that which describes them as diabolic. The ultimate cause of all such persecution is to be traced to the devil. Very forcibly has this been presented by a modern writer: "There is nothing more remarkable in the records which have come down to us of the early persecutions than the sense which the confessors and martyrs entertain that the great fight of afflictions through which they were called to pass was the immediate work of the devil, and no mere result of the offended passions, prejudices, or interests of men. The enemies in flesh and blood, as mere tools and instruments, are nearly lost sight of by them in continual reference to Satan as the invisible but real author of all. Assuredly they had right so to believe. So we might boldly say, even if we had not the warrant of such scriptures as this. Who that reads the story of their sufferings, that wondrous tale of inventive cruelty on the part of the heathen overmatched by a superhuman patience on the part of the faithful, but must feel that there is more than a conflict of bad men with good? There is rather on the one side an outbreak from the bottomless pit, the malice and might of the devil, making war against God in the person of his saints; on the other side, such a victory over Satan as could have been surpassed only when Christ himself beheld him fall like lightning from heaven."

It is also significant that imprisonment is made the type of the sufferings that would come upon this church. "The devil shall cast some of you into prison." The tortures inflicted upon the saints in those early days were accompanied and aggravated by imprisonment. In the records of those first persecutions we constantly find the prison doing its work. Those who endured torture without yielding were returned to prison, that so it might be seen whether hunger and thirst, darkness and chains, would not be effectual in breaking down the steadfastness which had resisted manfully the first onset of the foe. It seldom succeeded, however. The Church's early story furnishes a glorious commentary on these words.

Imprisonments, in all their varied horrors, the Christians of Smyrna would be called to endure. Through the spoiling of their goods, from their being excluded from lucrative employments, and through their property being wrenched from them, they had been impoverished already, for the divine King had said to them, "I know thy poverty;" but now they would also be called to undergo imprisonment and all the horrors connected therewith. All this would be to try, to prove these saints of the Lord, to

show them what of sin and unbelief were still remaining in them, and by so trying them to make them holier than they had been before.

Such was the burden of the message to this church, the immediate object of which, as to them, was, in addition to trying them, to prepare them for the great calamities that were coming. Being forewarned, they would also be forearmed. If no such notice had been given, when afflictions had actually burst upon them would there not have been danger of their being overwhelmed with despair? "Not anticipating any such fearful adversities, would not their cry have been, 'What means this terrible outburst of woes? Why these evils? Whence come they? When will they end?'" But, having been warned of all, they would be neither unexpected nor unprovided for.

Nor was it long before it was seen that this heroic church had much need of some such premonitory beacon. Even while the message was dropping from the lips of the ascended Lord the storm of persecution was gathering over them in its darkest clouds. Before the next generation had passed away it burst with frightful fury upon the Christians of Smyrna. The beacon, therefore, was peculiarly opportune, for the most shocking persecution that the primitive Church was called to pass through was that under the emperor Diocletian, which raged in all its horrors for no less than ten years.

### 9. TITLE OF THE SON OF MAN.

There is hardly anything in these messages so deeply interesting as the adaptations of the various appellations of Christ in glory to the conditions of the several churches. In this message this peculiarity may be seen in its perfection: "The first and the last, which was dead, and is alive;" or, as it is in the first chapter, "I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore." This is a picture of Christ in conformity to the needs of that church and to the prospects of persecution that lay before it. How instructive and how cheering to that church, so soon to enter upon dark days of imprisonment, of sore afflictions, and of blood, to hear sounding through them all and above them all, "Fear not; I am the first and the last; I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen, and have the keys of hell and of death." Observe how this title of the Son of man met the wants of this suffering church.

"I am the first and the last." I have in view the causes and the results of all your coming sufferings. I am from eternity to eternity, have for ever had in my hands the management of all events, and, as your elder brother and never-failing friend, will so conduct them in the future that they shall do you no lasting harm, but shall add to your highest, your everlasting welfare. He was the first and the last; all ages, all hearts, all events, lay before him and were under his direction, and not under the guidance of blind chance or the malign management of enemies. As the everlasting, almighty, and unrestrained disposer of all possible events, he would even order them in their coming trials so that they would promote the divine, and thereby the Church's immortal, glory. The bleeding church of Smyrna might therefore look to him with unfaltering confidence, no matter what sufferings she might have to encounter. He would stand by his people, though imprisoned or tortured or dying. Not one of their trials would come upon them without his having foreseen and provided for it. Malignant assaults from either human or diabolic foes were no new things to him. Even though the faithful people should have to pass through the dungeon or the flames to the martyr's death, He who was from everlasting to everlasting would direct all to such eternal purposes as would be absolutely glorious.

Nor was this all. Having himself suffered unto death, even the death of the cross, from the hands of persecutors, he knew from experience how to sympathize with the persecuted saints of Smyrna and of all other churches. "I am he that was dead." Persecuted child of God, as you go to the flames or to the rack or to the cross you are only following your Lord. What could that suffering church endure which he had not endured before them? He endured agonies which forced the blood out of his writhing body; which extorted from him the moan, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death," and which, because of his excruciating suffering, forced from him the accents of woe, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" What comfort it would be to them to hear from him, "I know what it is to die, for once did I lay down my own life"!

He died; but death could not hold him, hence his triumphant proclamation, "I am he that liveth, and was dead." This sublime fact he announces to the brave sufferers of Smyrna, in order that they might have comfort in prospect of that bloody death through which they would soon have to pass. He was dead, but is alive again—*alive for evermore*. In this also he was the example and

the forerunner of all his faithful people. They also, though they might die the martyr's death, would live again, and then die no more. To him the grave proved to be the gateway of glory immortal; so would it be to them, and in that hope they might have the most perfect consolation. Their enemies, though concentrating all their wrath, would only hasten their introduction to the bliss in which they should meet their Lord, to be separated from him nevermore. He had himself endured the sufferings, but had changed them into glory; and now, adorned with the wreath of victory, from the battlements of the heavenly city he holds forth the crown in sight of all the martyrs who are following him, for their present comfort and their joy immortal.

### 10. THEIR POVERTY, WORKS, AND SUFFERINGS.

Very significant is it that in this message, as in nearly all the other messages, the divine author begins by expressing his approbation of the Christian virtues in which the faithful in Smyrna excelled. Only a few words are used, but they are full of meaning, and well describe the character of that people. It should also be remarked that in the words of the message this commendation comes before censure or counsel or promise or threatening, immediately after the description of the Son of man as he is seen in his relations to that church. It comes first, as an indication of the divine affection of the Lord of the Church, standing at the head of all, and sending its benign spirit over every thought and word.

The church of Smyrna, as presented in these commendatory words, was a church of poverty, of faithful work for Christ, and of suffering for righteousness' sake. Of these characteristics, the first was its *poverty*. Throughout the inspired pages there are many assertions or allusions to the fact that the first Christians were generally poor in worldly goods. As a class they were a proof of the apostle's declaration, "Hath not God chosen the poor of this world?" "God hath chosen the weak things of this world to confound the things which are mighty."

There is clear evidence that the early converts to Christianity were generally from the poorer classes. Many of them, it is well known, were slaves. Then the fact is indisputable that, so ardent was their love to Christ and to each other, they actually impoverished themselves by their liberal gifts to their poverty-stricken brethren. Another cause of their poverty was that the persecutions of those days plundered them of their property or ruined them by "the spoiling of their goods" and excluded them from

such employments as would enable them to accumulate wealth. From these and other causes the believers of Smyrna as well as of other cities had to suffer much from the prevailing poverty. No doubt the Lord of the Church allowed it to be so, with their spiritual and eternal welfare in view, for very emphatically had he taught, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!"

The next thing commended in the faithful church of Smyrna was its diligence in doing good. "I know thy works," were the approving words of its loving Lord. In the phraseology of the present day, it was "a working church." In scriptural language, it was "rich in good works." In organizing that church and in bringing it in so short a time to its great strength its members must have been diligent in bringing their friends and neighbors out of the darkness of paganism into the knowledge of the gospel and to the reception of its blessings. Surrounded as they were by a dense mass of heathenism, they must have toiled day and night to break the gloom and to get the true light to illuminate their city. In thought, we can imagine them praying for their relatives over whom their renewed hearts yearned, telling both men and women of the wonders they had found in the news of Jesus the Saviour; urging their friends and neighbors to accompany them to the gatherings for prayer and praise; planning with each other how they could do the most honor to the name of Jesus whom they loved with all the ardor of first affection; giving both time and money to open places where the good tidings might be preached; visiting the sick in the same spirit that took their Lord about doing good; relieving the poor out of the scanty means which was all that they themselves possessed; suffering and struggling with an opposition that was strong, persistent, and cruel: weeping when they were sometimes almost ready to give up in discouragement; or rejoicing when they beheld new evidences that their cause was advancing. It required a brave and diligent piety to continue working in that region of spiritual death.

There were also peculiar duties which they owed to each other at that day when Christianity was just beginning to gain a foothold in that great centre of population and activity. They needed to instruct each other when the light was as yet so imperfect; to aid each other amid the various forms of opposition; to comfort one another when wellnigh overwhelmed with discouragements; to wait upon each other with a gentle hand when languishing

in sickness; to help when crushed down by poverty; to visit when pining in prison; to succor when cruelly driven away by family and friends; to guard tenderly when on the point of falling into temptation; to take gently by the hand and hold up when in danger of apostasy; to comfort when crushed by sorrow and fears; to stand by with help when assailed by peculiar and malignant persecution; to defend when vilified. To illustrate the graces of the gospel at that time, when example was such a power, was a work for which far more than mortal strength was required. In all these noble works there is no doubt these first Christians of Smyrna were faithful, and their Lord recorded their fidelity to their everlasting honor. They were an active, working church, and as such they are held up as a pattern for the instruction of all other believers to the end of time.

The other peculiar distinction of this church was their great endurance of suffering for the holy name of Jesus. Said their enthroned King to them, "I know thy tribulation." This peculiarity is made still more impressive from the fact that it is the very burden, the central point, of the message, "The devil will cast some of you into prison." The very power of hell would be put forth to afflict them.

We can easily understand several of the causes which brought on them such peculiar sufferings. One, as we have seen, was their poverty. Poverty is always hard to be borne, but in their case must have been peculiarly trying because of the contrast with the wealth by which they were surrounded. Another source of incessant trial was undoubtedly the persecution they were already enduring from that pagan, money-worshiping people who would vent on them their wrath. Amidst an ungodly community the humiliating doctrines of the Cross are always unpopular, always opposed, always persecuted with more or less vigor. Men love darkness rather than light, and strive with all the force of their evil hearts to extinguish the light. It was so in the time of these messages, according to what our Lord foretold when he declared, "I came not to send peace, but a sword." Depraved human nature has always risen up in cruel hatred against the first converts to Christianity. So did it arise against our Lord himself, the only-begotten Son, slain by the murderous hands of the very men whom he came to redeem.

### 11. THEIR RICHES.

It is worthy of special attention that the enthroned King, while predicting the toils, sufferings, and poverty of the believers in

Smyrna, breaks in with the strong affirmation, "But thou art rich." All the relations, circumstances, and interest of mankind lay distinctly before him; and here, from his heavenly throne, he declares to them, and through them to all believers of the world in every age of time, that Christians, though ever so low in the world's esteem, are rich—rich in the highest and best sense. The poor suffering believers of Smyrna possessed a secret store of riches of which the world never dreamed. They were rich in the sight of God, in whose judgment there could be no mistake. Their very poverty was a mine of inexhaustible wealth. They were rich in good works which formed a treasury stored up for them in glory. Even in this world they were rich in the possession of true wisdom, with its faith, hope, joy, and righteousness, with which they were adorned as with a royal robe. Their riches were unsearchable in their value, even according to the divine estimate. The apostle has given an inventory of their treasures in that marvelous list: "All things are yours: whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's." Can the imagination of man or of angel conceive of more? "Every beast of the forest, and the cattle upon a thousand hills" belong to the Lord, and he holds them in inviolable security for the enjoyment of his people. If it were possible to imagine anything higher, we might have it in that most glorious testimony of the Holy Ghost that believers are made co-heirs with the Son of man—co-heirs with him as he shall receive an infinite reward in the many crowns on account of his mediatorial work. We can speak of these infinite riches, but we can attain to only a very meagre conception of what they must be.

We cannot help pausing here to adore the gracious consideration of the Lord of the Church in giving this estimate of the character and condition of his servants for their comfort under the sufferings that were coming upon them. He is wont to give his people comfort whenever they most need it. His loving kindness is wonderful. What a comfort to the believers of Smyrna, even in their most trying days, to know from his own testimony that they were rich in the sight of God! In the great sufferings which awaited them they might sometimes think that the Lord had forgotten them and given them up to the will of their enemies, but then they would call to mind how he had asserted his special interest in their affairs, and given them credit for their toils, their fidelity, and their fortitude in his service. He

was not neglecting them, for, with more than the tenderness of a father, he watched over them, was well acquainted with their state, and would not hide himself from them. Instead of being indifferent to them, he was planning for their safety and happiness, and in due time would make known the wisdom of the way in which he led them.

There was still another important end to be accomplished by these special communications that were made to the church of Smyrna. They were intended to be not only descriptive of the state of that church in the sight of God, but also to be prophetic of the fortunes of the whole Church of God on earth. The poverty of the church of Smyrna, their faithful toil for their Lord, and their sufferings from the hands of an ungodly world were all indicative of what believers would ever be until the promised time of reward would come. Throughout them all the watchful care and protection of their Lord would never be wanting. There might be suffering, but above all would be the divine blessing in time, and the unspeakable joys of heaven in eternity.

### 12. BLASPHEMY BY THE JEWS.

A very remarkable notice of the character of the Jews at that time, and of their treatment of the early Christian Church, occurs in this message: "I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan." No doubt the influence of these people upon the other churches of the seven was of a similar character, but it was so conspicuous in Smyrna that we may describe it here once for all. We have abundant evidence that the Jews were very numerous in this city. The commercial importance of the place no doubt attracted them there. This people were then, as now, chiefly engaged in trade. Ulhorn has thus described this characteristic, no doubt correctly: "The principal business of the Jews was trade. Retailing, peddling, and especially the smaller money transactions, were almost wholly in their hands, and they prosecuted this traffic with such characteristic industry and shrewdness that the cities of Asia Minor complained to the emperor that they were completely drained by the Jews. The wholesale trade also was in many places entirely under their control." There is no doubt, therefore, that the Jews formed a very important element of the population of Smyrna. Moreover, they were always the chief opponents of the gospel wherever there was an effort made to set up a church. As evil spirits they followed the apostles and others wherever they were

led to proclaim the doctrines of the Cross. Every effort of believers that is on record gives painful evidence of this. Instances not a few are preserved on the pages of historians, as they are also on the pages of Scripture, which proved how often this was the fact.

What made this conduct of the Jews the more atrocious was that they did it in the name of religion. They professed to be zealous for the honor of the God of their fathers, claiming to be the only true children of Abraham. This was what the Lord styled their blasphemy—professing to be Jews, the covenant people, while in reality they were acting like the servants of the devil. Claiming to be God's true people, while all the time they were doing the work of the great enemy, was blasphemy of the grossest character.

Another feature of their blasphemy was their slander of Christ and his cause. It was their custom to brand the blessed Son of God as the "crucified," "the hanged," the "accursed." Even in their synagogues they reviled the purest and most self-denying of Christians as "Nazarenes," "Galileans," "Christians," "disciples of the Crucified," and through them they "blasphemed also that worthy name" by which they had been called.

So atrocious was this conduct of these hypocritical enemies of the gospel that our Lord declared them to be "the synagogue of Satan." The spirit of the devil was working in them—the spirit of pride and hatred and scorn and unbelief—and it was well that they, who knew not what manner of spirit they were of, should have their eyes opened to the perils of their true state. Their professed zeal for the true religion was displayed in that they had established a synagogue, the embodiment of Jewish worship. God, however, whose all-seeing eye penetrates the hearts and lives of men, pronounced it a synagogue of Satan. Their bitter persecutions of the cause of Christ could be nothing else than the service of the Wicked One. In their hatred and revilings of the Church and people of God they were a congregation of Satan, who presided over them, contrived their infernal plots, and directed to their murderous attacks. "Synagogue of Satan"—this from the lips of our gracious and long-suffering Lord! What a terrible denunciation! "The synagogue of Satan"—"A hard saying, a terrible word, but one which they, once the chosen people of the Lord, had wrought with all their might to deserve." The very height of their blessings had become the frightful measure of their fall. With terrible severity

does the Lord of the Church attribute all opposition to his cause to the influence of the Wicked One, and that with a precision of description which gives his language alarming vividness. The hostility of the Jews, because of their professed zeal, is the *synagogue of Satan*. The hostility of the heathen, because it is its nature and its supreme and unchanging purpose, is the *throne of Satan*. The hostility of heretics, because of its profound and malignant character, is the *depths of Satan*.

Most significant is it that this characteristic of the coming persecutions should be made an element in the beacon of the ages. The Jews would persecute, but in that they would only be a type of the character of the worst persecutions that would come. They would persecute out of professed zeal for religion, and such would be the nature of the most deadly attacks on Christ and his people. Witness the bitter, bloody, long-continued persecutions by the papal Church, with its deadly, diabolic Inquisition, surpassing in continuance and cruelty any other persecutions that have ever horrified our world. To warn of this was unquestionably one object of our Lord in thus depicting the blasphemy of the Jews.

### 13. POLYCARP.

It is fitting that we should follow this account of the spirit of the Jews in cruelly persecuting the early Christians by a flagrant instance of that persecution in the martyrdom of Polycarp, which occurred seventy years afterward, and which is so fully related by the historians of the age. No event in the history of the church of Smyrna, or indeed of any of the seven churches, excited so much horror as did this. In all the records of martyr history no other scene has left so deep an impression. As a specimen of the cruelties of the persecutions of that day, of the nature of paganism, and of the spirit of Judaism, it ought to receive very earnest attention.

Polycarp was one of the most pious, faithful, and amiable of the Fathers of the Christian Church. In his early days he had enjoyed the instructions of some of the apostles, by whom he was ordained in Smyrna, where he also spent his whole ministerial life. When he was at last called to suffer martyrdom for the name of his Lord, he had reached the age of ninety-six years and was greatly beloved and revered by all the people of God.

A violent persecution was raging under the emperor Marcus Aurelius, and this beloved man of God was its most distinguished

victim. Several Christians, both of that city and of Philadelphia, had been cast to the wild beasts for the amusement of the populace, and Polycarp, at the entreaties of his friends, was persuaded to conceal himself in a place of safety, and not needlessly expose himself to danger. Search, however, was made for him, and his place of concealment was made known by a child who was tortured until it revealed the secret. He had still time for escape, but he would not, saying, "The will of God be done." When seized, he melted the hearts of even his captors by his prayer for them; but he was dragged to the crowded ampitheatre when the games by which the people were brutalized were nearly ended. On his entry, a loud voice, which the old man accepted as from heaven, exclaimed, "Be strong, O Polycarp, and quit you like a man."

The Roman proconsul, moved by his age and venerable appearance, urged him again and again to obey the imperial edict, and to swear by the fortunes of Cæsar and to recant. The form of recantation required was, "Away with the godless!" The aged saint, with a sigh, looked up to heaven and said, "Away with the godless!" Again the proconsul urged him, "Swear by Cæsar, and I will release thee. Revile Christ." Calmly he replied, "Eighty and six years have I served him, and he never did me wrong: how then can I revile my King and my Saviour?" Vainly was he threatened with being thrown to the lions or burnt to death; to each menace he boldly replied, "I am a Christian." The populace, infuriated by the brutish sports, and not yet satiated with human blood, cried out, "Away with this man, the father of the Christians, the subverter of our gods, who teaches many not to worship or adore them!" They demanded that a lion should be let loose against him. This Philip of Tralles, the presiding asiarch, refused to do, on the ground that the games were finished. He had been touched by the example of Christian heroism. But the populace, thirsting for blood, cried out, "Let him be burnt alive!" and while he stood calmly praying the people rapidly gathered fuel from the workshops and baths near. Among these persecuting enemies the Jews were foremost. They were first and most eager in bringing logs for the pile, and loudest in clamoring that no mercy should be shown him.

The old man ungirded himself and took his place among the fagots. When they were about to nail him to the stake he said, "Let me remain as I am; for He who giveth me strength to sustain the fire will enable me also, without your fastening me

with nails, to endure its fierceness." Then, putting his hands behind him, he suffered himself to be bound, and uttered a touching prayer, thanking God, who had counted him worthy of the honor of martyrdom, for the resurrection to eternal life of soul and body in Christ, and ascribing glory to the blessed Trinity. The fire was kindled, and, the flames scarcely touching him, he was roasted rather than burned, upon which the executioner was directed to dispatch him with his sword. With their utmost malignity, the Jews were especially anxious that the body should be utterly consumed, lest, said they, "these people should leave the worship of the Crucified One for this man."

The ashes of Polycarp were collected by the faithful of his flock, and deposited in a spot of which the tradition has been preserved, and which is still devoutly visited by the Greek Christians of Smyrna. The tomb is pointed out, close by the ruins of an ancient church on the hill-side to the south-east of the city, very near the scene of his martyrdom, and overshadowed by a tall old cypress tree. There it stands as one of the most venerable objects that travelers visit in that city.

### 14. TEN DAYS' TRIBULATION.

Everything in this message to the church of Smyrna had a bearing upon its main object, which was, to give warning of the suffering that would come upon it. The final warning, that it should "have tribulation ten days," was the climax of all the warnings contained in the message. Its language, though so ominous, is also so symbolical that its interpretation becomes a matter of difficulty.

The first and the greatest difficulty pertains to the number *ten*—its ten days. Five different opinions concerning its meaning have each been advocated by eminent commentators: That it indicates—1. *Ten days' persecution* literally; some very violent attack of the enemy, lasting only that long; 2. *Ten years' persecution*, taking, according to a well-known principle of Scripture, the day for a year; 3. *Ten distinct persecutions*, which, it is supposed, marked the general warfare against the Church during those first centuries; 4. *A persecution that would be very brief*—so brief that it might be described by a continuance of ten days; 5. *A long period of persecution*, according to a well-known custom of Scripture that uses ten for a number that is indefinitely long. All these have some plausibility, but they do not satisfy, chiefly because they make too literal an application of the number, and

because their various interpretations are not sufficiently sustained by the facts supposed.

Of course, the real solution must be found in the interpretation given to the word *ten*. Then, in explaining it, we must be guided by what is known to be its usual meaning. As to that, we know that it is generally used, not as a number, but as a symbol. According to this usage, the idea of number does not enter into its application at all. It is rather the scriptural symbol for completeness—for the fullness of the subject, whatever that subject may be. Its meaning, therefore, in the present case must be sought in the completeness, the totality, of the tribulations which would come upon that church. Most ominous was the prospect it opened to them. Their cup of sufferings would be full. The idea of time or number does not come into the interpretation, but the degree of the tribulations or persecutions which they would be called to endure. The ten indicated the completeness or totality of the powers of the world as arrayed against the Church. This is something substantial, not loose and vague and dependent on mere guesses. Moreover, it falls in with the central point of the message, and is only another form of the same thing, the one form being that the devil would cast some of them into prison, and the other that their tribulation should be full. Thus it accords with the whole spirit of the message, the design of which was to warn that people of the coming of enemies for their persecution.

It is not true, as alleged by Trench and others, that the whole purport of this message is to comfort the suffering church of Smyrna; it is rather to prepare it for the coming persecutions by warning it that they would surely come, and that in the fullness of their tribulations. It is very suggestive that the message is so fully taken up with such admonition. Almost every word in it has the same complexion. The central point is, "The devil shall cast some of you into prison." Their tribulations were so great as to receive the special notice of the Son of God; the Jews would prove themselves to be a synagogue of Satan by their blasphemy and bitter opposition; even the title of the Son of man hints at the same thing by proposing himself as an example to them in his death on the cross; and here comes in the climax asserting that the very fullness of the world's persecutions would be heaped upon them. All this scarcely leaves a question as to the meaning of the expression we are considering. Its teaching is that the world would do its worst. It would concentrate all its powers upon the persecution of Christ and his people.

Moreover, these words of warning were far more significant as addressed to the church of Smyrna than they would be if addressed to any of the other six churches. That church was brought into contact with the nations of the world most fully of them all. The commerce of the city made it so. It was eminently the church that would be affected by the world; and how indicative it is, then, that the ten, the completeness, the totality of the world, should heap tribulation upon it! The whole world would oppose the church. I hear these words as the great message to that church which would be most closely connected with the world, and at that early day when they would be an element of the beacon of the ages, and I see the totality of all the world's energies and plans and powers as arrayed against the kingdom of Christ. I see the pride of time-honored paganism; the patriotism that required the deified emperors to receive the supreme worship; the blind, bigoted zeal of Judaism; the ferocity of a populace brutalized by the sight of bloody shows; the ignorance of times that were sunken in cruel superstition; the selfishness and pride of a hierarchy which had prostituted religion to their own aggrandizement; the sensuality of systems that had lost all their real piety; the darkest and cruelest contrivances of the Inquisition; the influence of courts sunken into the lowest debauchery; the most profound and pretentious researches of science; and the wildest and most unrelenting opposition of infidelity. I see the centuries immediately after the apostles; the time of the dark ages; the years of the world as it began to awake from the long dark prevalence of barbarism; and even the days in which we are now living. I see all the energies of man and all the ages of the world united in the totality of their power to oppose and persecute and destroy the people and the cause of Christ and human redemption. I see this foretold in the strong language of this passage, and I see it fulfilled in the records of time thus far, and I cannot question but that the opposition will continue until the whole work of Christ's kingdom on earth shall be ended.

This interpretation of the expression is not inconsistent with the gracious purpose of the message, which undoubtedly was to prepare God's people for the coming calamities and to strengthen them therein. When those calamities should come, it would be manifest that they were neither unforeseen, unprovided for, nor without a wise purpose. Dark and dreadful as they might be, they would in the end be made to promote God's glory and the ultimate welfare of his people. The world would do its worst,

would complete its opposition, but, in the midst of all, He who was the first and the last, who was alive though he had been dead, would take care of his Church.

### 15. ENCOURAGEMENTS.

The words of cheer which God delivered to the church of Smyrna in prospect of the sufferings which awaited them were very plain and full of encouragement. What afflicted child of God has not rejoiced in them? "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer." What a defiance they are to Satan, and to sin and evil of every name! The man who hears these words addressed to him from the lips of the Almighty, and takes them home to himself, is above the reach of persecutors and all their schemes, for he knows perfectly well that infinitely greater is the power with him than can be all the enemies that may be arrayed against him. Moreover, when God in this way addresses his faithful people, his language is not an ordinary expression of cheer, but is the utterance of a gracious purpose of goodness toward them. It was a word of promise and power that would effect in them the blessed feeling which it so positively expresses.

"Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer." Why should God's own people fear? The enemy was persecuting their Lord through them, but would not be able to inflict any real harm upon their Almighty King. "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer." Why should they, since God has put it upon record that all shall be for their good? These sufferings of persecution from enemies would be no worse and no more difficult to control than are many of the pains of sickness, and yet these are undoubtedly overruled for the welfare of those who endure them. To those suffering Christians of Smyrna it might have been said: "God has promised that all thy trials shall be for thy good, and there cannot be any mistake in the good word which he has spoken. The sufferings shall be for thy good—for thy highest good, for good which thou shalt enjoy in inexhaustible abundance, and that after all the good things of earth shall have passed away." "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer," for He who is the first and the last, who liveth and was dead, is able to protect, to support, to comfort, to uphold, and to deliver thee, and to give thee a glorious victory over all thine enemies.

"Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer." These

consolatory words, rich and precious as they must have been, were but the embodiment of the solace contained in the various promises God made to them in connection with the scenes of future suffering of which they were so fully warned. Merely to name these promises must have opened to them a door of blessed hope. Five distinct sources of encouragement did our Lord describe, even while he foretold the cruel persecutions they would endure. Even to us also of these last days it must be cheering to look at the alleviations of these future sufferings: 1. Their persecutions would be under the sympathizing control of their once suffering Lord, who was "the first and the last," and who had himself also died, but conquered death and rose again; 2. They would not be universal over them all; probably they would not extend to very many victims, for the warning is, "The devil will cast *some* of you into prison"—only *some* of them; 3. Their tribulations would be for only a limited period, for, though the expression "ten days" has the symbolic meaning of totality, it has also the subordinate application of brevity in time; 4. Their tribulations would be overruled to the production of benefits; that is, the persecutions would be allowed in order that the faithful might be tried; 5. They would be followed by a most glorious reward, for the exhortation and promise are given: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." When all these were received and properly considered as coming from the lips of the God of truth, they must almost have taken away the dread of the ominous future.

It is true that the sufferings of the people of that church would be terrible, but the Almighty God of forbearance and love would be on their side. Unseen by both friends and foes, their loving Lord would stand by his martyrs even in their dying agonies. From his celestial throne his all-seeing eye would be upon them, bright and cheering to them, but frowning upon their enemies. What was it to Abraham, though his very heart-strings were torn with woe as he held aloft the knife, ready to plunge it into the side of his appealing son, when he heard the voice of God, so full of deliverance; or to the three Hebrews of Babylon, that the flames were roaring around them, when side by side with them they had the presence of the Son of God; or to Stephen, that the merciless stones were beating out his life, while far above the reach of mere human view the very depths of glory were opened to his gaze, and his eyes rested upon the beatific vision!

Can we read of such scenes as these without the conviction that

to the martyrs of our Lord his presence has always been so real and so glorious that their agonies were even forgotten? "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness," we may be sure, is the good word that has borne them through every anguish. This was all in all to the dying heroes. God's presence with his martyrs!—what would it not do for them! It would give to them a sense of security, peace, and comfort that would drive away from them every dread and lull every pain. It would fill them with such a sense of the glory awaiting them, and that was just about to burst upon them, that they would be enraptured by the prospect, even as it was also with their Lord, who "for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame." It would give a dignity, even a glory, to their very tortures to reflect that they were counted worthy to suffer shame "for the name of their Lord." May we not also feel assured that, their Lord being present with them in their martyrdom, there would be a supernatural interposition that would take away the agonies the very recounting of which makes our flesh to crawl? Oh, the gracious words of our compassionate Lord, "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer,"—to how many martyrs they have been brought home freighted with peace and heavenly rapture!

In these cheering words the blessing of the Most High God was pledged to the suffering church of Smyrna, and that pledge was fulfilled to the utmost. That church was blessed in a wonderful manner throughout many centuries. Its subsequent history was a history of its martyr sufferings, yet its light of truth has never become utterly extinct. Christianity, through all the centuries, retained a foothold there, even in the days of the most intolerant rule of the Moslems. The church lost its splendor; the light has sometimes become very dim and partially obscured, but the candlestick has never been removed. The condition of the Christians has been better there than in any other of the six churches.

The preservation of the church of Smyrna through so many ages and so many vicissitudes is an impressive instance of the blessing of God down to generation after generation. No other church was called upon to suffer so much for the name of Jesus, and no other church has been kept by Christ so long in existence. Compare it with the church of Sardis or of Laodicea or of Ephesus, in cities that were then rich and flourishing, but voluptuous

and proud; now the three churches and cities are utterly extinct, while the church of Smyrna has a continued existence in an important city even to this hour. It is a most significant fact that that church has now existed for eighteen centuries; it is corrupted by the Greek superstitions, but Christ is its King and Captain still. Moreover, they are not a mere insignificant handful, but they are so many and so decided in their Christianity that the Mohammedans hate them and give utterance to their bitter scorn by stigmatizing their city by the contemptuous name of *infidel Smyrna*.

The fact is so remarkable as to call forth the wonder of every thoughtful student of the Bible that the two churches of Smyrna and Philadelphia are the only ones of the seven against which no special charges are brought, and that they are the only ones that have an existence at the present time. Can this be a mere accident amid the vicissitudes of human affairs? Is it not rather a decided and manifest proof of God's blessings upon fidelity to him?

### 16. FIDELITY AND REWARD.

A beautiful and instructive feature of these messages is that each of them contains two distinct promises or exhortations implying promises—one pertaining to the particular local church, and arising from its special circumstances, and the other of a general character, applying to all churches and all ages. In this message to the church of Smyrna the two are: the local engagement, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life," and the general one to all churches, "Overcome, and thou shalt not be hurt by the second death."

As to the first or local application, both exhortation and promise are shaped according to the circumstances of the church, as epitomized in its central point or leading characteristic. Their form is, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." The nature of the fidelity of the church is determined by its peculiar circumstances, and these are embodied in its central point, "The devil will cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried." The same warning was called forth by the hostility of the Jews, by the sad prediction, "Ye shall have tribulation ten days," and by the whole tenor of the message.

The fidelity, then, would of course consist in their unflinching endurance of persecutions. The divine appointment demanding it would be: "Do not shrink from the endurance of the suffering that may be required of you for Christ's sake. Do not apostatize

from your faith, even in the face of the greatest dangers. Do not deny your Lord, even if it should cost you your lives to confess his name. Do not be frightened away from a good confession by the prospect of the very greatest sufferings. Face all the danger and suffering without flinching. Show to your unrelenting enemies that they cannot conquer you by threats of the most cruel tortures they can contrive. Trust me that I will stand by you in the hour when the rage of earth and hell shall be the most fierce. Encourage and strengthen your persecuted brethren by your brave endurance of death with its utmost horrors. Endure all rather than dishonor me, my cause, and my people by yielding to Satan and his powers. Be thou faithful unto death—not simply unto the end of life, but even to the endurance of death, which is the worst evil that the enemy can inflict."

The reward that would follow was described according to the well-known customs of the place and the times. In the Olympian, the Corinthian, the Isthmian, and the Smyrnian games it was the custom to reward the victor in racing, wrestling, boxing, or other contests by wreathing a crown around his brows. With this custom the Christians of Smyrna were familiar. They knew, too, that it was the custom to inscribe the names of such victors in the archives of the games, that they might be kept in perpetual remembrance. The garlands which formed such crowns were wrought out of the leaves sometimes of ivy, sometimes of parsley, sometimes of olives, sometimes of oak, and sometimes they were woven of violets, and sometimes of roses. He who received such crown was held in the highest honor. To reach that crown was an object which men kept before them the greater part of their lives. They subjected themselves to toilsome and wearying training, and when at length they reached the coveted prize they felt more than repaid for all the hardships they had endured. For that crown they were willing to toil and suffer and deny themselves to any degree. Crowned with the victorious wreath, they had reached the joy of their lives.

Thus also does the Lord bestow a crown of victory and honor upon all those who are conquerors over their spiritual enemies. It is well worthy of special consideration how often a crown is made the emblem of the future blessings which he has in reserve for those who were faithful to him while on earth. In Timothy it is, "Henceforth there is laid up for me a *crown of righteousness*, which the Lord, the judge, shall give to me at that day: and not to me only, but to all them also that love his appearing."

In Peter it is, "When the Chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a *crown of glory* that fadeth not away." In Corinthians it is, "Now they do it to obtain a *corruptible crown;* but we are *incorruptible*." In Isaiah it is, "In that day shall the Lord of hosts be for a *crown of glory*, and for a *diadem of beauty*, unto the residue of his people." In this glorious promise to the faithful of Smyrna it is a *crown of life.* A crown of righteousness, of glory, of life, of beauty—an incorruptible crown—how affluent is the imagery used to depict the exceeding glory that God has in store for his people! The crown which is promised here would be made up of life—of life in its vital ecstasy and endless duration. The life of earth which they might now lay down in his service would be recompensed with another infinitely more perfect in heaven. "The life so worn out in his service or laid down in his cause shall be rewarded with another and a much better life that shall be eternal"—so writes the godly commentator Matthew Henry.

This crown of life with which the faithful martyrs shall be adorned in glory will be the symbol of victory by which they shall be distinguished amid the ransomed ranks. They shall be recognized by saints and angels as the triumphant heroes who suffered unto death for their Lord, before whom every crown shall then be cast. To their praise for evermore will it be repeated that they came up out of great tribulation. Throughout the celestial companies they will be recognized and spoken of as victors most glorious.

It was fitting that this promise most singular and most glorious should be made to the church of Smyrna. That church was distinguished above all the others by its pre-eminent sufferings; surely it should also be distinguished for its blessed reward. Accordingly, God so ordered it in his considerate goodness. The crown of life held over its head was shaped by his own divine hands. By his glorious Son, the Captain of our salvation, it will be placed on the brow of the victors. Thought can conceive of no honor greater than this. Earth has no reward that can be named beside it. Honored Smyrna, great were the sufferings which thou didst endure, even unto death; poor Smyrna, now enriched; calumniated Smyrna, now honored; threatened Smyrna, now established; militant Smyrna, now triumphant; triumphant Smyrna, now crowned!

### 17. CONQUEST AND SAFETY.

One of the many remarkable things in these messages is that in each of them some duty is enjoined, expressed by the word

"overcometh." The nature of the duty is in each case determined by the peculiar circumstances, enemies, or temptations with which the church had to do. The reward would be rendered in every case, and it would be of such a nature as to show its connection with the sacrifice made for the cause. In each message there is an "overcome;" so also in each of them is there a blessing that would follow. So would God strengthen and encourage his servants to endure all. He would bless them in accordance with what they courageously endured in honoring him before men. There is something that is wondrously interesting in the relation which the reward bears to the victory achieved.

The special reward here promised those who should overcome the enemies of both their God and themselves was that they should not be hurt by the second death. There is a first death and a second death. The one is the death of the body, which none can escape, and which many of those who were addressed in the message would endure from the hands of persecutors; the other is death spiritual and eternal, and which the Scriptures designate by the word *hell*. The one is death temporal, and is over in an instant; the other is to be dying eternally. In this aspect hell is appropriately called the second death. It is like death inasmuch as it is the most fearful thing of which we can conceive, because it cuts off all hope and is accompanied by terrors inconceivably fearful. It is to suffer the pangs of death without abatement for ever and ever. It is infinitely worse than the first death, from its agonies of the soul and from the awful thought of being in the woes of death for evermore. What must it be to live and be eternally dying! Such is the second death, so terrible that it is mentioned but in three other places in the New Testament.

Now the promise most blessed to all those who shall overcome their spiritual foes is that *they shall not be hurt* by this second death. It is said not merely that the faithful conquerors would not die the second death, but that they would *not be hurt* by it. There is profound significance in this. Much more is it than that they shall not die—even that none of the accompaniments of death shall come upon them. Nothing that produces death or precedes it shall terrify them. None of its horrors or alarms or evils of any kind shall be experienced by them. Into the regions of their abode death shall not enter, shall not be spoken of, thought of, or feared, or its gloom even cast a shadow. What matter about the first death, even though it come in the most horrid form that the gates of hell can contrive? It will end in a few minutes or

hours at most. But the second! How can the lost escape its woes that stretch away into endless ages?

This promise was wonderfully appropriate to the conquering sufferers of Smyrna. They would die awful deaths for the cause of their beloved Lord, but then they would never die again. The instant when their heart stopped its beating would be the last instant of death they would ever know. The moment the body of that martyr expires, death, with all its terrors, would be over for ever. As soon as the first death is gone the blessed saint enters a realm where all is imperishable and unfading, and where death will be a thing of the past. They die for their Lord, then live for evermore.

When looked at in this light this promise to the conquerors becomes unspeakably precious. Not hurt by the second death is the surest promise of life without an end. The language is calculated to make the deepest possible impression of future blessedness. According to it, they who gave their bodies to be burnt in the first death will receive no hurt from the second. They will have nothing to fear in the other world. The first death shall not hurt them; the second shall have no power over them. Such persons are the most blessed beings who walk this earth. The most exalted angel might envy them. No death can touch them. They can defy it, with all its terrors. What tongue can utter, or pen record, or heart imagine, what Christ has done in dying for us?

From all this we can easily see how great is the advance in the promise to this church of Smyrna over the one made to the Ephesian believers. That was a mere engagement to them of the blessing of immortality, denoted by eating of the tree of life. This one goes much farther, inasmuch as it rescues its happy subjects from all the evils of death. They will not even dread it. Their home hereafter will be in the blessed realm where life shall reign in all its perfection.

### 18. SMYRNA AS IT IS NOW.

Smyrna is the only city of the seven which has maintained its existence, and which continues to flourish at the present time; all the others are either insignificant or ruins. There can scarcely be a doubt but that the hand of God is in this. It has been besieged and sacked, shaken down from its foundations by earthquakes, its inhabitants almost annihilated by pestilences, and it has been wasted by the wear and tear of all these centuries, but still it

exists and flourishes as one of the sisterhood of earth's great cities. Undoubtedly, it is because of the fidelity of its church that it still stands as a church, and has been blessed as a city above the others. It cannot be that this city, so true to its God above the rest, should also be above them in the protection granted it, and the prosperity still granted it, as a mere accident amid the vicissitudes of human affairs. Its mere location in a splendid harbor and on the line of a vast commerce will not account for all; for Ephesus also possessed the same advantages, but is now an utter ruin. In its history we cannot but read the wonderful working of Him who said to it, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

Even at the present day Smyrna is a great and important city. Its location is one of surpassing excellency. On one side lies the splendid gulf by which it was connected with the Ægean, and through that with all the cities that lined the Mediterranean. On the other side spreads out one of the finest agricultural countries in the world, the wealth of whose produce pours into it from every quarter. In its immediate location it lies on a beautiful plain which extends three miles from the waters of the beach to a rampart of lofty hills. That plain it fills for miles along the shore. In its whole circumference it is four or five miles. Its climate is charming. Were proper sanitary laws observed, it would be almost perfect. Taking all these advantages into account, it would be no exaggeration to affirm that Smyrna in its location is surpassed by scarcely any other city in the world.

We have alluded to its bay or gulf. It runs up into the land, a beautiful sheet of water, for about thirty-three miles. Its width varies from five to fifteen miles. At its mouth it is sheltered by a large island which protects the shipping from the winds that so often drive in from the west. It is entered through bluff headlands, one of which, called the Blue Nose, is peculiarly striking as it stands like a guard over the entrance to the city. Up both sides of the gulf lie several promontories and islands, some of which in olden times were the haunts of Levantine pirates. The south side especially is exceedingly beautiful, consisting of steep hills the sides of which are clothed with wild pears and various evergreens, while the tops are bare, and at the water's edge are orange-groves and waving masses of corn-brakes. At the head of the bay this mountain-range rises to the height of about three hundred feet, in two peaks which are called the Two Brothers, and on the summit of one of them is the weather observatory of the

city. The head of the gulf is the city harbor, and so well sheltered is it that, though there is daily a strong breeze, no vessel is ever endangered, and so deep is it that even vessels of war and large steamers can ride in it with ease. No wonder that such a harbor, on such a line of commerce, should be constantly crowded with vessels of every nation.

The scene as one sails up the gulf and approaches the city is picturesque in the highest degree. The lighthouse out in the water, the sandy beach, at some points running far out amid the breakers and sparkling with salt-pans, and other objects, give it a peculiar charm. All around the city, moreover, there are sites that are rare and beautiful. The hills which stand back of it on all the inland side, with their mystic ruins and their many groves climbing up to their brow, far above the elevation of the houses, are magnificent in appearance. The clusters of cypress trees which mark the many cemeteries; the old city wall with its gate opening upon a plain which is entered over a stone bridge by the side of a well celebrated for centuries; the bold Mount Pagus, towering above the other hills and crowned by a ruined castle; the trellises of figs and grapes; the fragrant orchards of lemons, oranges, and citrons; the groves filled with doves, thrushes, quail, and snipe; the waters of the sheltered bay swarming with fish; and the sweet, balmy atmosphere,—all these make the suburbs of the city an earthly paradise.

The best view that can be had of the city is from the summit of Mount Pagus, the Castle Hill which towers high above all the south-east angle of the city. There we take our stand. Around us are the venerable ruins of a castle or fortress supposed to have been built by Alexander the Great. From our lofty outlook the scenes we behold on every hand are of matchless grandeur, and when we associate them with the memories of the olden time they are deeply impressive. In the distant west the blue waters of the gulf lie gleaming in quiet repose. Nearer by, at the head of the gulf, is the harbor, with its grove of stately masts of the vessels that have come from many a port. On a closer scrutiny we can discern among these vessels the colors of Britain, America, France, Austria, Russia, and other lands. Nearer still, on the flat plain extending from the water's brink to the foot of the hill on which we stand, three hundred feet above the houses, lies the city proper, with all its busy life. A splendid sight it is, with its houses of glittering whiteness, its slender minarets towering up in every quarter, and its rows upon rows of narrow streets. Not

far from where we are standing, with its solitary cypress tree beside it, we behold what tradition affirms to be the tomb of Polycarp. Near to it are the ruins of the race-course where the multitude were wont to congregate, and where the venerable saint expired amid the martyr flames. That martyr tomb, standing there for all these centuries in its lonely gloom, is a wonderful monument of the reverence in which his memory was held, of the truth of the divine record, and of the sufferings which were the special characteristic of the church of Smyrna.

Although this city is far superior, in the greater part of the comforts and conveniences of life, to most Turkish towns, there is one thing in which it is sadly deficient: its sewerage is pre-eminently bad. Fifteen hundred years ago it was complained of, and it is no better at the present time than it was then. The narrow streets are channels for all the accumulated filth from the houses. Ordinarily they have no sidewalks, but gradually slope down from both sides, with a very slight descent, to the centre, which therefore becomes a gutter for the most offensive wash. As might be expected, the city is sometimes visited by the most destructive pestilences. Earthquakes, which often visit it, as well as all that coast, are not the only calamities by which it is afflicted. It is noted for the devastations which it has often suffered from the plague, an epidemic even more virulent in character and more fatal in its effects than cholera, which is so justly dreaded. Its causes are this want of cleanliness in the houses, streets, and inhabitants, the neglect of the commonest sanitary precautions, and the pollutions which mingle with the water used for drinking and washing purposes.

When the shadow of the Destroyer rests upon the doomed city, the European consuls and merchants retire into the country or shut themselves up in their houses, admitting no one within their gates. Many of the citizens then abandon their dwellings, and live in the plains and on the mountains under canvas; the islanders of the Levant return to their ocean-gardens, and silence reigns in the Frank quarters. But the Moslem, a fanatical believer in fate and in the doctrine that human precautions avail nothing against the fixed course of events, disdains to escape or to use the most common measures of security. The crier from the morgue announces at certain hours the names of those who have been stricken down, and invites their friends to attend their remains to the grave. Then their friends, disregarding the danger of infection, not only attend, but even wash the body before

interment, and afterward carry it upon their shoulders, a change of bearers pressing forward at every ten or twenty yards to share in the last pious office.

### 19. INHABITANTS.

The population of Smyrna is probably in the neighborhood of one hundred and seventy-five thousand. Of this number about eighty-seven thousand, or one-half, are Turks, and of the other half about forty thousand are Greeks, twenty thousand are Armenians, and twenty thousand are Jews. The results of this heterogeneous composition of its population are very curious. An eye-witness thus describes them: "The citizens are distinct from each other in religion, dress, language, and manners. Each race has its own ceremonies, its own feasts, and even its own calendar. It is not at all unusual for one race to celebrate a festival on a day devoted by another race to penance and fasting. The Turks close their shops on Friday, the Jews on Saturday, and the Armenians, Greeks, and Franks on Sunday. There are no intermarriages or social communication between these different races. They never meet with each other except in the market-place, and they converse together only on the price of cotton or other produce, or on the rate of exchange between piasters and dollars. The distinction of race is more strongly marked amongst the women than amongst the men. The Greek and Frank ladies have their faces uncovered; the Armenian and Jewish allow about half of the countenance to be seen; while the Turkish women hide every feature but the eyes. A stranger would be led to believe that more languages were spoken in Smyrna than in any city which has existed since Babel. On one side caravans and strings of camels pour in from every part of Central Asia, Syria, and Arabia; on the other, fleets crowd the harbor from all the maritime states of Europe and America. The general medium of communication is the *lingua Franca*, a barbarous jargon composed of bad Italian and worse Arabic, together with a plentiful admixture of vulgarisms and nautical phrases from every language of Europe."

The religious condition of Smyrna is a subject of the greatest importance with all thoughtful Christians. Islamism, of course, takes the lead in numbers, it being a Turkish city. The followers of the false prophet have fifteen mosques for the celebration of their rites, and the tall, slender minarets tower up in the various parts of the city. The Jews have several synagogues,

for they still hold a conspicuous place in that busy sea-port. It has been observed by travelers as a significant fact that the Christians are in a better condition in Smyrna than in any of the other six cities. Numerically they are important, as in their various branches they comprehend nearly half of the population. The Armenians have at least one church, and it is in a tolerably flourishing condition. The Latins have a monastery, as well as various places of worship. The Greeks have several churches. Among that people there are many persons who are interested in the Word of God, and diligent students of its sacred pages. There are also several missionary enterprises in the city, and through them the light is returning to that old home where it once shone so brightly.

### 20. WARNING OF THE BEACON.

All this suffering by the church of Smyrna is God's admonition to us that, in one way or other, all the true followers of Christ would be called upon to suffer for his name's sake. As the other messages teach other great features of the Christian life, so suffering for righteousness' sake is the lesson of this. It is the same as taught by our Lord's warning: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." The same is taught in another place: "We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." So is it that this element of our heavenly beacon is intended to give us warning of the constantly-recurring persecutions to which, as the followers of Christ, we shall be exposed. From the reiterated admonitions of this kind we ought to be prompted to prepare ourselves to meet with opposition and enemies in all our Christian course. We should expect that sufferings for Christ's sake will surely come, but at the same time remember that this will not be a real calamity, for the teaching of our message is that Smyrna suffering was Smyrna blessed. It should also be borne in mind that we have a better example than that of Smyrna—even that of our Lord; for he too was a sufferer, and in his sufferings he set us an example. In all our afflictions he was afflicted; his sufferings were even unto death, for the attribute he takes to himself in this connection is, "I am he that liveth and was dead."

The message also makes it sure that our sufferings for Christ's sake are productive of our highest welfare. Certain it is that the most noble of our race have been those who were made perfect though sufferings. They are bloody but glorious pages of

history on which this is recorded. It is not likely that similar persecutions will come upon the children of God of the present day; but the principle of opposition and hatred of our Lord and his followers still lives, and it does and will show itself in ways that will be suited to the age. Not by physical violence and shedding of blood, but by moral and mental persecution, will the opposition be conducted. The persecution is continued still, and now the suffering is from infidelity, with its malignant eye upon all that is true and hopeful for men; from indifferentism that cares not about the soul or God or eternity; from worldliness that has neither eye nor ear for anything but the present day; from Socialism in its various forms, appealing to all that is vile, and arraying the passions of the worst classes against God and goodness; from lawlessness animated only by the purpose to destroy; from hypocrisy arraying itself in the livery of Christ the better to deceive and ruin; from destructive criticism of God's Word, the energies of which are intent on obliterating every hope of mankind; from Mormonism, whose great appeal is to the sensual, the base, and the degrading; from Arianism, whose various efforts are to take away all the glory from our Lord; and from popery, which lies in wait, ready to spring upon the simple truth as it is in Christ Jesus. All these are the sad fulfillment of the prophetic warning in the experience of the church of Smyrna, the characteristic of which is stamped upon the whole course of the Church throughout the ages.

But there are advantages which can be clearly seen as having sprung from this suffering for Christ's sake. It is a true record, which has been made through time, that suffering churches have been the best churches—the best in God's sight. We need have no fear for either ourselves or the cause that we love. The sure word of God is pledged: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." We are to be faithful unto death—this day and every day. We are to live a life of entire consecration, crucified unto the world, and the world unto us. And if we have sufficient faith to let him, day by day and in all things, dispose of us, take what he will, give what he will, send where he will, we need not envy those who literally suffered martyrdom for his name's sake. True it is that, by divine appointment, suffering is to be the lot of God's people. If we suffer, it is in accordance with his heavenly decree. Instead of lamenting that it is so, it should rather be a joy to us, that so we shall be fulfilling his

appointment, and rising to the highest destiny as he has wisely arranged. Nothing is more sad in this world of sin and sorrow than that the devil casts the best of men into prison, into the fangs of beasts, and into roasting flames; nothing is more glorious, in the glimpses which are vouchsafed us in the celestial world, than that the souls of the martyrs are now beneath the throne of the ever-blessed Jehovah, awaiting the crowns that will yet be placed upon their honored brows.

# PERGAMOS.

THE OXFORD OF THE ORIENT.

## THE MESSAGE.

And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges;

I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, *even* where Satan's seat *is:* and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas *was* my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.

But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.

So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.

Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that received *it.*

# CHAPTER X.

## THE OXFORD OF THE ORIENT.

### 1. CELEBRATED CITY.

In all that country which in ancient times was called Mysia, the most important city was that which in these messages was called Pergamos, but which at the present time is known as Bergamo. Most appropriately has some writer said of it that it was at once "a royal residence, a university town, and a cathedral city." Its location, the historical events with which it was connected, the high degree of culture attained by its inhabitants, and the renowned institutions it contained, all united in rendering its name famous. Originally it was simply a strong fortress that crowned the lofty peak of a mountain in the midst of an enterprising people. In process of time, however, it felt the invigorating touch of Alexander the Great, whose successors were impressed with its importance, and raised it to an eminence which few cities of its age attained. So important was it in the height of its prosperity that Pliny described it as "longe clarissimum Asiæ Pergamum." It is situated on the river Caicus, about thirty-five miles from its mouth, and inland from the sea about twenty-three miles. It lies at the base and on the declivities of three high and steep mountains which flank the city on three sides. "The middle summit is the highest, and is crowned by an ancient and desolate castle." The ascent to the castle is quite circuitous, over a broad, ancient, paved road. Halfway up the hill is an outwork consisting of a wall of considerable length with frequent towers. A little above this is a platform intended for a battery, and built entirely of marble fragments cemented in mortar. The castle embraces the entire summit of the hill, and includes a space of eight acres. Facing the south-east is a wall of hewn stone a hundred feet high, built into the rock, which helps to form a spacious area where anciently stood a temple visible everywhere from the plain of the Caicus, and even from the sea on the other side. On the north and west sides the descent is almost perpendicular into a deep narrow valley. Through this

runs a rivulet with an aqueduct of lofty arches at one extremity, and at the other a massive pile filling the whole valley, and forming with it a *Naumachia*, or place for the exhibition of sea-fights. When the stream occupied only its natural bed and the interior was dry, it was probably used for chariot-races and gymnastic exercises. At the eastern extremity of the hill are the remains of a theatre whose entrances are still standing. Its area, however, is filled with houses and gardens against the sloping sides where the semicircular seats rose one above another.

A recent traveler gives this description of the city and adjacent country: "The view from the summit of the Acropolis is not excelled by any that I ever saw. In every direction mountains are seen, near by or far away, and they present every variety of form and every shade of color known to mountain scenery. The broad plain of the Caicus stretches away to the east, terminated by a mountain-barrier dim in the distance, and the same plain continues its course to the south-west until its varied hues of yellow and green are exchanged for the deep blue of the sea, and this is limited by the dim mountains of the island of Mitylene, the ancient Lesbos. The Caicus is seen at intervals winding its way along the plain, and in the mountain-passes in other directions many smaller streams are traced as they thread their way through crooked valleys. All the elements of a magnificent landscape—mountains, plains, rivers, and the sea—combine to make this one of the most sublime views ever enjoyed by the people of an entire city looking abroad from their own house-tops. Its commanding site made the city itself also a magnificent object when seen from the plain below, and especially from the plain toward the south-west, whence it stands out distinctly against the sky and seems to exalt itself above all the hills."

Inside of what was the city are ruins which indicate not only its former greatness, but also a remarkable degree of progress in what we are wont to consider modern improvements. In the deep valleys that lie between the hills on which much of it was built there are broken arches of immense sewers, built of brick and marble fragments, which show that cleanliness and health were cared for by the old Pergamese as surely as they are at the present day. There are also ruined arches of aqueducts which spanned the valleys and furnished the inhabitants of the city with a plentiful supply of water. Perhaps the most interesting of such remains are the fragments of tessellated pavements which have been found amid the unsightly heaps of the old city. These are

specially interesting because they are the oldest specimens of the kind that have been discovered. They are found on the platforms that were built at various altitudes on the declivities of the steep hills. Aqueducts, sewers, and tessellated pavements amid the ruins of old Pergamos!—they give evidence of the high degree of culture and comfort to which it attained.

The entire area of the ancient city is now strewn over with ruins. There are ruins in the deep valleys, ruins on the declivities of the mountains, ruins on the highest peaks, ruins around the mud hovels where the present population have their habitation. The eastern part, overhanging the great plain of the Caicus, is a heap of ruins. This feature of the city has been thus summed up: "Nothing conveys a clearer idea of the enormous wealth of old Pergamos than the vast quantities of white marble which everywhere strew its site. These blocks and columns and sculptures are crowded on the surface and under it; many of them are shafts thirty and forty feet in length. For centuries these ruins have served as Turkish quarries. The marbles are continually being broken up and burnt for lime. Fragments of statues strew the ground. Large sculptures are frequently disinterred, but are at once broken up by the Turks, who believe that treasure is concealed in the heads of these idols, which are therefore at once demolished. This notion, combined with the Moslem horror of idols, has probably destroyed more Grecian statues at Pergamos than now adorn the museums of Europe."

We shall be able to form a more accurate conception of the ruined condition of the old city if we depict some of what were once its magnificent structures. Among these, one of the most impressive is the enormous mass of the broken walls of the church of St. John, the "*Agios Theologos*." The broken rows of granite columns, the massive brick-work, the slabs of marble, the fragments of a huge dome, and other remains, show that it must have been of enormous size and strength.

The ruins of the amphitheatre are another impressive object. So immense were they that huts and even gardens are now seen in the area it once covered, and its marble fragments formed a quarry from which the cemetery of the place has obtained its grave-stones for many years.

We may add a few words more concerning its Naumachia. It was an artificial lake, for the exhibition of sea-fights. Between two of its house-clad hills there flowed the rivulet called Selinus. At the upper end of this, or where it entered the city, it was

spanned by the great aqueduct. At the lower end, or where it left the city, a dam was placed across its path, and the valley was turned into a lake on which vessels could be manœuvred as in a battle at sea. When the water was drawn off the space was made the scene of games, shows, and gymnastic exhibitions.

The Acropolis was another of its vast structures, the ruins of which are very striking. A traveler has thus described them: "On a bold hill just behind the modern city is a long, irregular line of crumbling wall, enclosing many clusters of shattered ruins where broken friezes and half-sunken columns of white marble shine forth in striking contrast with the dark basaltic rock of which the hill is composed. This was the Acropolis, or citadel, which originally comprised within its walls the whole of the ancient city, and where temple and royal palace once rose majestically side by side and towered over the valley of the Caicus beneath."

The remains of the Nicephorium are amongst the most remarkable of the objects found in this old city. It was a splendid grove in which were erected the temples of the chief gods that the populace worshiped. In its cool retreats were also the healing waters which drew so many invalids to that favored city. But its chief attraction was the temple of Æsculapius, the god of the city. Renowned were the church of the Agios Theologos, the temple-crowned Castle Hill, the immense amphitheatre, the great aqueduct over the Valley of Selinus and the famous Naumachia—these are all stupendous ruins; but more stupendous than them all was the fane of Æsculapius. To this grove and temple, with their healing springs, invalids were wont to repair from every part of the land. The concourse to this temple was almost without number or cessation. Thousands used to offer their sacrifice and dedicate their votive gifts, after which they slept in the porticos of the temple, where it was believed the god would reveal to them in a dream the remedies or the observances that were to cure them. As they passed the night there they invoked the deity, who communicated remedies either in dreams or by his priests, who distributed medicines and performed surgical operations. So widespread was its reputation that even emperors visited the fane and waited for the healing inspiration. The emperor Caracalla in the year 215 repaired to Pergamos for the recovery of his health; but Æsculapius was unmoved by his prayers. When Prusias, second king of Bithynia, was forced to raise the siege of Pergamos, he nearly destroyed this temple. Like the

temple of Diana in Ephesus, it possessed the right of asylum. Caius Fimbria the proconsul, when abandoned by his troops and foreseeing an implacable enemy in Sylla, fled to this sanctuary, where, in despair, he fell upon his sword.

We dwell so fully upon the description of what this old city of Pergamos was, because we would know as much as we can about the scenes and the people among whom its church was founded. We would gather from these, as hints, what sort of people they were to whom this message came from the throne of God. We would depict the influences which gave character to the church and led to the peculiar developments of the gospel there. We have seen that the church of Ephesus was planted amid scenes of superstition, magic, witchcraft, and jugglery, and the church of Smyrna amid busy and excited scenes of commerce. We now see that this of Pergamos was established amid gorgeous structures and splendid temples, amid priests of various deities, scholars from every part of the land, artists of the highest skill, and invalid pilgrims from far and near throughout all Asia.

### 2. THE CITY AS A ROYAL RESIDENCE.

Pergamos seems originally to have been a fortress of considerable natural strength, guarding the approaches from the shores of the Ægean into the rich plains and valleys of the interior. When the city began to be formed about the base of the hill, the fortress served as a citadel. In consequence of the strength of the place, it was selected by Lysimachus, one of the generals of Alexander the Great, as a place of security for the reception and preservation of his stolen treasure, which amounted to nine thousand talents. The care of this treasure was confided to Philetærus of Tium in Bithynia, in whom he placed the greatest confidence. Philetærus remained for a long time faithful to his charge, but finally, B. C. 283, in revenge for ill treatment by Lysimachus' wife, revolted from him, appropriated the treasures, and declared himself independent. The misfortunes of Lysimachus prevented him from taking vengeance upon the offender, and thus Philetærus remained in undisturbed possession of the town and treasure for twenty years, having contrived by dexterous management and wise measures to remain at peace with all the neighboring powers.

Philetærus transmitted his principality to Eumenes his nephew, B. C. 263, by whom its territory was much extended. After a reign of twenty-two years he was followed by Attalus I., a nephew of Philetærus and a very successful monarch, the first to take the

name of king, who flourished for forty-seven years. On his death, B. C. 197, his son Eumenes II. became king, and reigned for thirty-eight years. During his whole reign he remained the firm friend of Rome, and because of his services received large accessions to his territory. The city owed more to him than to any other sovereign of the Attalic line. He beautified it by erecting many of its most magnificent buildings. Under his rule it became a celebrated seat of literature and art. The most lasting monument of his liberality was the great library which he founded, and which yielded only to that of Alexandria in extent and value. Of this library, and of the first use of parchment skins for writing in the copying of books for it, we shall hereafter speak more fully.

The next of the family to take the throne was Attalus II., a younger brother of Eumenes II. He reigned from B. C. 159 to B. C. 138. As a warrior he was the most renowned of the family, and in his wars he was almost always successful. The years of repose which succeeded his wars he devoted to the building of cities and the patronage of learning. He was surnamed *Philadelphus*, from the fraternal love he displayed toward his brother Eumenes during the lifetime of the latter. The city of Philadelphia, to whose church one of the seven messages was sent, was founded by him and derived its name from him.

The last of these kings was Attalus III., son of Eumenes II., whose reign extended over the brief period of only five years, and terminated the dynasty, B. C. 133. He was not only the last, but also the worst of them all. Indeed, his extravagance was so boundless, and his cruel murders so many and so causeless that an impression prevailed that he was partially insane. While superintending the erection of a monument to his mother he was affected with sunstroke, and soon after expired. Upon his death his kingdom became a province of the Roman Empire.

Such was the history of the kingdom of Pergamos. The princes of the Attalian family or dynasty, who ruled over it during its whole career, were extraordinary men, and their influence upon those who first formed the church of Pergamos was such as to give us special interest in them. It is almost incredible how much they did for their kingdom in so short a period. We must bear in mind that they found it little more than a mountain fortress. And what did they make it? Besides the magnificent public buildings and porticos on which they lavished the wealth which accrued from their conquests, their love of literature and of art led them to ex-

pend almost fabulous sums in the collection of a public library which rivaled that of Alexandria. One of them is said to have bid twenty thousand dollars, or a sum equal to that, for one picture by the famous painter Aristides, and to have given nearly double that price for another picture by the same artist. Through their energy the city spread down between the rivers Selinus and Cetius, far beyond the old fortress. They extended the Nicephorium, or grove of all the gods, in which was a collection of temples to all the principal deities of the Greek mythology. Their enormous fortune caused the name of Attalian wealth to pass into a proverb. Under these able monarchs the city glittered with baths and palaces, aqueducts, amphitheatres, fountains, statues—with all the evidences of artistic luxury and wealth. Strangers were attracted thither from all parts of the world by the fame of its riches, its magnificence, and its learning, and in the time of our Lord it stood conspicuous as the brightest and most prosperous of the Asiatic cities.

Still other inventions and improvements added to the fame of this city of the Attalian kings. It was enough to render it peerless in renown that it became the seat of Oriental learning in that age. Among other distinguishing things, here were also invented the costly hangings or tapestry which have been so universally employed in modern times, and which were called by the Romans *aulæa* because the *aula* of the palace of Attalus was the first so adorned. What other city has had so many honors connected with its name as had this capital of the Attalic kings—where the beautiful tessellated pavements were first used, where Oriental learning received one of its first and most important impulses, where sumptuous aulæan tapestries were seen in the decorations of its palaces, where in one magnificent cluster were collected the most gorgeous of temples, where was collected a library the most valuable save one of all antiquity, and where the first and best of schools for the teaching of medical science was established? All these improvements in the comforts and elegancies of life could boast of Pergamos as their birthplace and home.

The sum of all, we may present in the words of Professor Plumptre: "It is not necessary to go back to the earlier time when the rock citadel of Mysia, about three miles from the banks of the Caicus, first became celebrated for its worship of the mysterious Cabiri, and then, like other sacred places, became a treasury where kings and chieftains deposited their wealth. It will be enough to remember that after the breaking up of the

Macedonian monarchy it became the capital of a wealthy kingdom, and that Eumenes II. sought to rival the glory of Alexandria by the foundation of a library in which were stored the chief works of the literature and philosophy of Greece; that it became famous for the worship of the great deities Zeus, Athene, Dionysos, Apollo, Aphrodite, and, with a more special devotion, of Æsculapius; that around that last form of idolatry there gathered a great medical school which in after times was rendered illustrious by the name of Galen. In this religious character lay its special claim to greatness. Dean Blakesley has well described it as 'a sort of union of a pagan cathedral city, an university town, and a royal residence;' and when, on the death of Attalus III., it passed by his bequest to the Roman republic, and afterward to the empire, it retained its old fame, and was described by Pliny as without a rival in the whole province of Asia."

### 3. ÆSCULAPIUS.

We have already seen that amid the leading pagan deities who had their headquarters in the several cities of the seven churches, that of Æsculapius was in Pergamos. As the metropolis of Diana was Ephesus, and that of the deified Homer was Smyrna, so that of this deity was the city of the Attali.

In the poems of Homer, Æsculapius is represented as a physician of surpassing excellency. From this normal conception of him the idea was developed until he is found as the god of the healing art. The myth concerning him was that, in consequence of his astonishing success in subduing disease and saving life through his medical skill, Pluto became alarmed lest his realms should become empty of inhabitants, and appealed to Jupiter, who granted his request and with a flash of lightning struck the great physician dead. Then mortals became indignant at the loss of one whose wonderful cures had been so great a boon to mankind, and out of that indignation, as well as from gratitude for his benevolent services, they succeeded in having him elevated to the rank of the gods, among whom he was distinguished as the healing deity.

So great was the fame of his skill that it was currently believed that he had even restored to life many persons who had been dead. His statues represented him as the ideal of manly strength, health, and beauty, seated upon a throne, in one hand holding a staff or pole around which was wreathed a serpent, the other hand resting upon the head of a serpent, and at his feet a dog, the symbol of

watchfulness—a virtue shown by him in his treatment of diseases. His temples were always located on hill-sides, in healthy sites, and with a spring of pure water flowing beside them.

This pagan deity Æsculapius had his metropolis, his capital, his headquarters, in Pergamos. He was the tutelary deity of the city. So fully was he identified with it that a common epithet by which he was designated was *Pergamos Deus*. According to heathen phraseology, he was the guardian deity of the place. Tradition had it that the city was greatly indebted to him, inasmuch as he was regarded as its protector, the saviour of the city connected with which there were so many things that were unique among the gross superstitions of that age. In Pergamos was his most magnificent temple, from which went out the edicts by which his worship was directed. His was the national religion. Moreover, the worship of Æsculapius was the leading cultus, the prevailing spirit which reigned among its people. And sadly notorious was the idolatry which was developed therefrom. It became the most splendid ritual of all that was rendered to idols at that time. As the Nicephorium with its splendid temples, the elegant buildings of the city, its great library, its pavements, and its aqueducts were the most gorgeous of all cities, so also were the services of its religion the most imposing.

Another influence of this superior deity of Pergamos was that around it was attracted a collection of the most celebrated of other pagan deities. In that beautiful grove which lay on the lower declivity of its central mountain, extending to the rivulet Selinus, there shone the splendid temples of the gods whom we have already named. Of them all, however, the centre and crown was that of Æsculapius, whose fame was reflected from the rest, and awakened the spirit which caused them to be celebrated.

Serpent-worship was the chief element in the rites and ceremonies of this deity. Æsculapius was always worshiped in the form of a snake. In his temples a serpent wreathed around a staff was his invariable symbol. The emblem was in the form of a living serpent, fed in the temple, and considered as its god. Beside that, however, there were other rites. For instance, patients who had been cured by him were expected to present in his temple either a goat or a cock. They were also in the habit of hanging up in his temple a thanksgiving tablet recording the nature of their disease and the method by which it had been cured. So supreme was Æsculapius in Pergamos that its coins, which are sometimes found at the present day, are always

adorned by the symbol of serpent-worship. So great was the esteem in which he was held that the cures he effected were regarded as miracles and supernatural mysteries.

4. SATAN'S SEAT.

"Where Satan's seat is"—this is a terrible description to be given of Pergamos by the lips of the God of truth and righteousness. No ordinary degree of wickedness will account for such strong condemnation. Such words indicate that it was a place of peculiar wickedness, as if Satan had there his permanent home. He was there enthroned in all his diabolic power. There was something in Pergamos which gave it a notoriety above all other places. It seems to have been the very metropolis and fortress of the powers of darkness. It had the bad pre-eminence of being the headquarters of opposition to Christ and his cause. This is all the more significant in view of the fact we have already seen, that it was the perfection of worldly culture, refinement, and elegance.

To study this pre-eminent depravity of Pergamos is a task at once painful and instructive. A brief synopsis of the elements of this great wickedness may be given in these five particulars, some of which will call for fuller consideration: (1) It was the metropolis of the worship of Æsculapius, which was in fact identical with the worship of the devil. (2) The very acme of God-defying idolatry was reached in its splendid temples. (3) It was the home of the most debauching heresies, such as that of Balaam and the Nicolaitans. (4) The very worst of persecutions began their bloody course in this city. (5) It was the fortress, the fountain, of prevailing opposition to the cause of God.

This was the sum of its pre-eminent wickedness; but some of its peculiarities require that we give them special attention. Why it is named as the seat or throne of Satan appears especially in that *it was the city of Æsculapius*, and in that *he was worshiped in the form of a serpent, the emblem of the devil.* Even had their general depravity been as great, no other of the cities could have been so appropriately called Satan's seat. Here the devil was worshiped in his recognized emblem—that of a serpent. It is startling to find amid the ruins of Pergamos one of its old coins, and on it the likeness of a serpent, and then to reflect that from the fatal hour of the Fall this was the devil's established emblem. Little did the votaries of the healing god intend, when they made

a serpent his symbol, to identify his worship with that of the prince of all evil.

Still another thing in the worship of Æsculapius gave peculiar significance to the brand here put on Pergamos as the throne of Satan. The whole character and work of the devil as revealed in the Apocalypse and other parts of Scripture presents him as always striving to copy after the Most High God. The first object which met the gaze of the entranced John as heaven was opened before him was Jehovah upon his celestial throne. According to his deceitful nature, Satan too sits upon a throne, but here it is in Pergamos. "Satan, in impious mimicry of God's throne in heaven, sits upon a throne in Pergamos."

Another thing which gave great significance to the expression "Satan's seat," in this connection, was that in Pergamos the work of persecuting the people of God either began or assumed a deadly form, and that such persecutions were prompted by Satan himself. As to the church of Smyrna it was predicted that "the devil shall cast some of you into prison," so here his work in this respect was seen. Here his agency is taken for granted, and the dreadful results are depicted. It is more than probable that in Pergamos, the country's capital, there were courts of justice, which, according to forms of law, doomed the followers of our Lord to death because of their faith, and thus gave to persecutions the sanction and authority of the government. This seems to have been the fact, inasmuch as in immediate connection with the expressions "Satan's seat" and "where Satan dwelleth" is the reference to the martydom of Antipas. Certain it is that the diabolic work of persecution was a peculiarity at that time of Pergamos, and that here it was appropriately called the throne or seat of Satan's power.

This brand of infamy was justly fixed on Pergamos for another cause still. As we have already seen, not only was that city the metropolis of Æsculapius and his worship, but it was also the headquarters of idolatry. The temples of all the leading deities of paganism were collected there. The very glories of those great temples were a defiance thrown in the face of the Almighty.

The moral depravity of the place was as might have been expected from its idolatry. The fact that one of the most beautiful and attractive of all its fanes was that of Venus, was in some measure indicative of the works of darkness which prevailed. Every intimation we can gather shows that it was exceedingly corrupt. In this respect also it was the seat of Satan. In every

aspect, therefore, was it well named the throne of the Evil One. Its snake-worship, which was nothing else than the worship of the devil; its loathsome practices, originated by the most degrading heresies; its bloody persecutions, either commenced or greatly increased there; its degrading lewdness,—all these conspired to make its brand of infamy but too evident in its significance. So deep was that brand, and so keenly alive was the entranced seer to the malice of Satan as exposed in that city, that he reiterates it, and repeats the awful charge, "where Satan dwelleth."

### 5. GREAT LIBRARY AND PARCHMENT.

For four things the city of Pergamos was celebrated throughout the civilized world: (1) As the home of Æsculapius, the birthplace of Galen, and the headquarters of the healing art. (2) For its immense library—save one, the largest of all antiquity. (3) For the invention of parchment. (4) For aularian tapestry which has adorned some of the most sumptuous halls the world has ever beheld. Two of them—its renown as the headquarters of the healing art, and the invention of tapestry—we have already considered. It remains that we should rehearse whatever authentic history has left us concerning the library which was the city's greatest glory, and concerning the invention of parchment.

In that very happy description of Pergamos as "a cathedral city, an university town, and a royal residence," we have also been led to look at it in all these aspects save as "an university town." In this aspect its best modern representative is Oxford in England. Oxford, with its Bodleian Library, will give us some idea of what it was. A better name, then, could not possibly be given to it than "the Oxford of the Orient."

Among the things which gave this characteristic to Pergamos was the fact that it contained an eminent medical school, whose fame was increased by the name of Galen. The healing god Æsculapius, the medicinal waters of the sacred grove which its gorgeous temples adorned, the world-renowned school of the city, —all these conspired to make Pergamos a most honored name among physicians of every age. From this it resulted that its streets usually swarmed with medical students from every quarter of Asia.

Its immense library, however, is that which has usually attracted to Pergamos the most attention. That library, if not founded by Eumenes II., the third of the Attalian dynasty, received a new impulse from him that soon gave it its pre-eminence. It was

founded, or aroused by him to new life, about two hundred years before Christ. Of all the glories by which he strove to exalt his city, there was none to which he gave his heart so fully as this. It seems to have been his reigning ambition to make the library of his city equal, if not superior, to that of Alexandria in Egypt, which is acknowledged to have been the greatest collection of literary treasure of all antiquity. He determined to collect into it every volume of Greek literature, science, and philosophy that was in existence. The fabulous sums of money inherited by him from his predecessors or acquired in his successful wars he spent in collecting a store of books that, in value, would surpass that of the Ptolemies on the Nile. He succeeded so well that the number of volumes in that enormous library, it is said, was not less than *two hundred thousand!* The philosopher-king ransacked the whole world, bent upon collecting every existing work of every known author. He must have had an army of transcribers writing them out for that wonderful collection.

The great difficulty soon proved to be that of finding material on which his transcribers could write such countless numbers of books. Up to that time the substance generally used was papyrus, the great field for whose production was the banks of the Nile. Ptolemy, the king of Egypt, forbade the exportation of papyrus from his kingdom, for the purpose of checking, if possible, the growth of the Pergamean library and preventing its rivaling his own. This gave rise to a new branch of industry at Pergamos. Its tanners set to work to find some new material for books. The hides of sheep and goats were gathered in from the mountains, and by new and improved methods of tanning a new material was prepared, which proved better than the old. The rough surface of the papyrus was eclipsed by the new smoother and whiter one developed in the experiments which the necessity of the case forced upon the artisans. From the place where skins were thus first prepared and used for writing, and from the beautiful surface they presented for that purpose, they were called "Pergamenæ chartæ," from which the word "parchment" was derived, and the material thus named has come down to us as that on which documents intended to be permanent are engrossed. Though almost two thousand years have passed away since then, the great manufactory of parchment, even to the present day, is in Pergamos, or Bergamo, as it is now called. The banks of the little rivulet Selinus, which flows amid the ruins of the old city, are fringed with tanneries engaged in its production.

Relieved by this invention from his great and only real difficulty, Eumenes went on with his grand project of collecting the greatest library the world had ever seen, and succeeded until only that of Alexandria was its superior. The immense store of volumes continued to increase so long as Eumenes II. held the throne of Pergamos, and even so long as the government was in the hands of the Attalian dynasty. Even after the independence of Pergamos was lost, and its rule fell into the hands of the all-conquering power of Rome, it continued still to increase.

But after a time disaster came. The Roman Mark Antony made the treasure which the wealth of the world could not purchase a present to the beautiful Egyptian queen Cleopatra. Soon afterward it was removed from Pergamos to the banks of the Nile, and added to the library of Alexandria. The two greatest literary treasures of any age were then merged in one and became peerless in fame, and transcended in value the libraries of that or of any other age of the world. So it stood and continued to flourish for many years, until out of an insane and most depraved zeal of the Moslem the reigning caliph committed to the flames the greatest, richest, most valuable collection of literary works ever seen.

### 6. PLANTING OF THE CHURCH.

From the consideration of that in the message which is earthly, material, and pagan, we now turn to that which is spiritual, immortal, and divine. As to the planting of this church or the first preaching of the gospel there we know nothing with absolute certainty. It could hardly be but that travelers who had been at Jerusalem attending on the great Pentecost, and had returned to Pergamos, or those on their way through that city, would relate, especially to the more thoughtful and devout, some of the strange events they had witnessed there; and some, particularly of the Jews, would undoubtedly listen to them and be more or less impressed. There is no doubt, moreover, that in some of those missionary tours which Paul made from Ephesus he visited a place of so much importance as was this renowned city. John also, and Apollos, and others of those earnest souls among the first Christians would certainly not neglect a city whose influence was necessarily so great. We know, in fact, that Paul was more than once in its immediate vicinity, and that on one special occasion he sojourned seven days at Troas, a city close by it, and enjoyed a blessed communion season there with his

friends. This could hardly be without his visiting Pergamos and preaching the gospel there.

It is certain that at the time they received this message from God the church of Pergamos was strong and influential. Of the history of the church after the reception of this message only little is known. We do know that it lived on and flourished for a time, but beyond that no more. Like its sister churches, it suffered great persecutions. The irresistible power of Rome would tolerate any form of pagan worship, but no kindly hand had it to extend to the unoffending religion of Him who was "meek and lowly of spirit." Like all other churches, that of Pergamos suffered on until the time of Constantine. Then its persecutions ceased, but its piety did not flourish. It lived on, for we hear of its pastors or bishops in attendance at great general councils of the Church. It sinned, and it suffered the penalty threatened in the message, for the two-edged sword cut deep. Still its candlestick was not utterly removed. Our covenant-keeping God did not forget or forsake the church of Antipas. Not a little significant are the words of the traveler Arundell: "The threat against the church of Pergamos has been almost literally fulfilled, but still its candlestick has not been removed out of its place, like that of Ephesus. Pergamos has, in a measure at least, been saved from destruction; for, though in the midst of a blindness and poverty sadly contrasted with her former privileged condition under the first rays of gospel light, and amid the treasures of unperverted truth, a portion of her inhabitants still preserves the Christian name and worship."

### 7. TITLE OF THE SON OF MAN.

The title given to our exalted Lord in the message to the church of Pergamos is "He which hath the sharp sword with two edges." In the corresponding vision of him recorded in the first chapter there is an additional element: "Out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword." A sharp sword with two edges coming out of his mouth is the whole symbol. It was a sword; it was sharp; it had two edges; it was issuing from the mouth of the Son of man. The *sword* gives warning that the celestial King is armed to meet whatever enemy may dare to oppose his cause. It is *sharp*, so that it can easily cut through every obstacle and penetrate to the very heart. It has *two edges*, and will therefore be effectual in either direction: it can either bless or destroy. It comes *out of his mouth:* this tells of its peculiar nature—not steel

or brass or material in any sense, but moral, intellectual truth uttered by him—the Word he speaks, exposing every contrivance of lies, tearing away every covering of falsehood, and opening to the light of day all that is dark and deceitful. One strange symbol is thus made to stand out before us as a wonderful revelation of the way in which the all-wise and omnipotent Head of the Church will defend his Church amid all perils.

The emblem is most expressive. Most forcibly does it describe the Word of God as in operation in conquering error and opposition to the Heaven-guarded Church. That this is its true significance we are left in no doubt when we look at it in the light of other scriptures. In the great epistle to another of the seven churches we read of "the sword of the Spirit which is the word of truth." The mode of using it is taught in a memorable example when the Son of man himself, in conflict with the prince of darkness, three times over flashes the heavenly weapon in the cry, "It is written." "It is written." "It is written." In varied form its matchless efficacy is described in the predicted doom of the Wicked One, "whom the Lord will consume with the *spirit of his mouth*, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming." Most satisfactory is this on the symbol now before us, "the spirit of his mouth" and "the brightness of his coming." What could better explain the meaning of the strange emblem, "Out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword?" Still another inspired utterance opens to us the very kernel of celestial mystery: "For the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." This leaves nothing doubtful as to the meaning of this significant symbol.

Such is the sword of the heavenly message, and such the mode of using it. Observe next how applicable is the symbol to this church of Pergamos and to its peculiar circumstances. It is wonderful in its adaptability to that people, and wonderful in the wisdom of our exalted Lord in taking this striking method of making the important facts known to the Church. The title of the Son of man as he appears in the message was just such as that brilliant, learned, but tempted people needed. The inhabitants of Pergamos were mighty in their peculiar wickedness; the Lord of their church was armed with the sword, sharp and two-edged. They were learned through their great medical teachers, their schools, and their library; his power issued from his mouth,

the vehicle of wisdom—a wisdom infinitely greater than any that is found among mankind. They had amongst them the seductive doctrines of Balaamites and Nicolaitans; he had the weapon of the double edge that could cut through their depraved hearts or cut away their seductive teachings. We see much of the appropriateness of this title in the particulars we have already named, but we shall see still more as we proceed in the study of the message. Exalted to the supreme throne, far above earth's wisest and proudest and most depraved, our Lord looks down upon their plots against his kingdom, and with a word he can expose their schemes or with a promise arouse to new strength and energy the hearts of his faithful followers. How vain, then, in his sight are the seductions of Balaam or the artful reasonings of Nicolaitans!

### 8. TRIALS AND STEADFASTNESS.

In very strong language does the heavenly King express his approval of their loyalty, their courage, and their steadfastness in his cause. How warm his words of praise: "I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is; and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you where Satan dwelleth!"

To understand this language we must remember that it cost something to be a Christian steadfast and true in the circumstances under which the people of that church were living, and that there was much meaning in the Lord's words, "*I know where thou dwellest.*" It was not pleasant and popular and respectable to be a Christian then, as it is now, when it is almost a needed passport to some circles of society. It was not fashionable and an honored and safe thing then to confess the name of Christ, as it is now. On the contrary, it would seem as if then, and in Pergamos, there was a league of the world, the flesh, and the devil to oppose the kingdom of our Lord and to pull down his throne. Moreover, the faithful of that city had no experience to guide them, no traditions to hallow the sacrifices they might make, and no encouragements from others to stimulate them. The greatness, the grandeur, and the learning of the city were no help to them, but rather one of their most formidable hinderances. That they remained faithful and true and steadfast notwithstanding all this was their greatest honor, as it most clearly proved the genuineness of their religious principles.

That the church of Pergamos stood out against all the allurements of their city and maintained the integrity of their Christian principles and practices was the excellency which was noticed and extolled by their Lord. To be unflinching followers of the humble, reviled, even accursed, Jesus of Nazareth, required a degree of faith and firmness which we can scarcely exaggerate. Daily to pass by gorgeous palaces, theatres, and magnificent temples; to visit celebrated schools and world-renowned libraries, constantly to see thousands of scholars and princes from all lands, and to witness grand processions accompanied with all that was attractive and beautiful and soul-stirring, and yet to find a greater attraction in the humble assemblies of those who were despised and poor and even slaves,—this told of a depth of faith which could be comprehended only by the heart-searching and heart-reading Son of God.

But there was a devotion deeper still. To refuse to participate in the spirit and customs of paganism was to take a position outside of respectable society, and in proud Pergamos that must have been a great sacrifice. Paganism was fashionable there, and the gay, the heartless, and the frivolous resorted to the temples as to places of show and amusement. They were fashionable meeting-places. Paganism pervaded and gave tone and character to everything. It was the very atmosphere around them, and that in the most seductive form. Paganism was in the markets, where the Christian had to decide whether he would buy and eat the meat which had first been offered to idols; in the amusements, which were filled with stories and customs learned in places of heathenism; in every object met with as one walked through the streets, where buildings or pictures or statues of some deified monster disfigured every corner; in the pomp and noise of processions from temple to temple in honor of some deity; in the customs of society, all of which were in some way moulded by the worship of Æsculapius, Venus, Jupiter, or some other idol; in their feasts, where idol-meats were on the tables and idol conversation was the theme on every tongue; in the customs of society, where births and marriages and funerals were all pervaded by the spirit of idol-worship; in schools and workshops and exchanges, in all of which the names of pagan deities were constantly heard; and in music and recitations and lectures, in all of which the never-exhausted themes pertained to their gods and deified heroes. To stand up in the midst of all these, faithful and untainted, required a strength of religious principle of which, with our weak faith, we can scarcely

conceive. It required a courage which must have come from God's own planting and the Holy Spirit's nourishing. It could have been done only through a faith that made realities of things unseen, and a hope that carried far above the seductions of earth and the glories of the present.

More potent still were the influences which were in operation to lead the faithful of this church away from the cause that was so dear to them and from the King whom they adored. Not only did foul paganism taint everything with which they had to do, but that paganism was made more degrading still by its alliance with a loathsome sensuality. All those splendid temples and services and processions and attractive sites were mixed with a lewdness the most filthy. That mystic grove was sacred to the gods; but these were unclean in themselves, and corrupting in their influence upon those who resorted thereto. From all this sensuality, so congenial to the depraved heart, had the heroic Christians of Pergamos torn themselves away when it interfered with the supreme adoration which they were to render to their exalted and holy God. Everything must be sacrificed by them, in order that they might prove themselves loyal to their heavenly King. They stood every test, and received the approbation of their loving Lord.

More decided still was the opposition which they had to encounter, and which could not force them to flinch from their faith and unconquerable love. Those brave Christians held fast to the name of their Lord, and would not deny their faith, even though persecution held over them the sword, the flames, and the roar of hungry beasts. In what special forms their sufferings for the name of Jesus came we are not informed, but that they were very dreadful is without question. Several allusions in the message clearly intimate that the diabolic work had already commenced. The mention of the martyrdom of Antipas, the assertion that the headquarters of Satan were there, and the intimation of crises when they must either confess or deny their Lord,—all these tell of tortures inflicted and blood shed. Those first persecutions of the inexperienced Christians must have been awful. They must have been peculiarly terrible, because that they—persecutions, instead of glorious reward—were the fate of those who were giving up all for their Lord; because of their inexperience as to the divine support all martyrs for Christ might expect; because of the fresh wrath of Satan aroused by the noble steadfastness of the followers of Christ, as well as by

the new invasion of his kingdom; and because of the cruelties inflicted by the hands of men long brutalized through paganism.

It should also be noted to the honor of those first brave martyrs that they might easily have escaped by simply denying their Lord. Had they only uttered a word against the Crucified One, or thrown a snuff of incense on the pagan flames, they would have been instantly released. Yield, however, by the slightest word or act, they would not, since that would have been recreant to their Lord, for whose glorious name they were willing to give up all, even to lay down their lives.

Then, too, their works of loving loyalty—how many and grand and true they were! Though we find no detailed record of them it is not difficult to conceive what some of them must have been. We can easily imagine how, to any who would listen, they would tell of the heavenly city and temple more glorious than the earthly one wherein they dwelt; direct inquiring souls to the wondrous Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world; heal the wounds and soothe the sorrows of those who had suffered for the dearest of names; defend the renown and extol the excellencies of that dear Friend who was altogether lovely; and strain every nerve to build up the kingdom whose glories shall outshine and whose duration shall outlast all the empires of earth. Such works as these they must have been which the Son of man applauded in the church of Pergamos.

### 9. ANTIPAS.

The gracious consideration of our ever-blessed Lord is here seen in rescuing from oblivion and placing in everlasting remembrance one name that otherwise had never been heard of in the annals of earth. It was that of Antipas, to which the Lord of the Church gave divine immortality by the tender epithet "My faithful martyr." This heroic man was thus honored as if he were the only —at least the chief—martyr for the name of the heavenly King. "My faithful martyr"—what unspeakable honor as coming from the lips of heaven's adorable King! Though named but once, what a flood of light is opened by that one expression! "Even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth." This tells little about him, but it tells much about the state of the Church at that time and in that place. All that is known with certainty about this first martyr is soon told. The most reliable traditions concerning him assert that he was one of those who became followers

of Christ while our Lord was on earth; that he firmly faced the persecutions of the priests of Æsculapius in Pergamos, who were exceedingly violent in their rage against the increasing numbers of the Christians; that, as Paul was attacked and Stephen slain, so he was put to death in a popular tumult; and that, in order to make his death as terrible as possible, he was executed in an iron cage shaped like a bull and heated red hot.

The comforting fact to us at the present day is that the Son of man, even though armed with the sword of the double edge, took notice of that solitary follower so loyal and steadfast. So important was his fidelity regarded that its record is made on the inspired page, where nothing finds a place excepting what is of prime moment. Then, if it be on these pages, is it not also written in the book of life? Though nothing more is known of Antipas in any writing of man, there is a celestial record where all is put down with unerring accuracy. No other account of him exists on earth; but there is a martyrology in heaven wherein all is written in full and from which no name is ever blotted out. We would like to know more of this faithful hero who gave up his life for that Name that is above every other name; we would like to know more of him whom alone God has named in that suffering age and church; but we must wait until the book of remembrance is fully opened. Meanwhile we "must leave the name that thus shines like a star in the firmament of heaven, without knowing more than that he who bore it had, in open conflict against the powers of evil, borne his witness that Christ is the one Healer, Preserver, Saviour, and that he had drawn upon himself the wrath of those who had seen their craft endangered, or were roused, apart from motives of interest, to fanatic indignation."

### 10. CENTRAL POINT.

The burden of this message, its central point, is in the charge against the church, "*Thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam*," and "so hast thou them also that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate." What was the precise nature of the sin here charged against them? It is not charged that as a church they were guilty in this thing, but that they suffered to remain among them those who were so guilty; they knowingly continued them as members of their church; they fraternized with them in full communion; they tolerated them in good standing, as if no spot were upon them; they asso-

ciated with them in worship, at the Lord's Supper, and at their love-feasts, as if their known errors in practice and theory were of no account. No stigma was fixed upon their sins, no discipline exercised, no distinction made. Who these were, professing to be Christians, but adherents of the doctrines of Balaam and the Nicolaitans, we shall examine hereafter; but the censure upon the church for suffering them to continue among its members must first receive attention.

The great evil of retaining in unquestioned fellowship those who deny fundamental truths and indulge in sinful practice is here impressively pointed out as a warning for all succeeding ages. It is a great sin and a very dangerous thing to retain in full fellowship of the Church those who in both theory and practice are unsound and unholy. God warns us of it, and holds that warning up to be seen of the whole Church.

(1) It is a sin to hold fellowship with such evil, because *we shall thereby strengthen it* by the weight of our influence and example. I may condemn the principles and stigmatize the practice, but who will believe me while I hold their advocates as my chosen friends and acknowledged partners in the general faith? Why do I hold Christian fellowship with them, but because I believe in their tenets? Thus do I strengthen and encourage them in the evil system of which they form a part.

(2) It is a sin, because we thereby partake of the evil with which we hold fellowship. On that account, looking at another aspect of the matter, the great Head of the Church commands us to separate from all that is untrue and unholy: "What agreement hath the temple of God with idols; for ye are the temple of the living God: as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

(3) It is a sin to continue in fellowship with those who are corrupt in theory and practice, because it is a deplorable indication that our own hearts are too much in love with that which is evil. Where then is that keen sensitiveness that takes alarm at even the slightest taint of impurity? Where is that supreme love for purity of heart and life that is wounded by even the presence of anything that is unholy?

(4) It is sin, because association with falsehood and guilt will

inevitably contaminate our own souls, and dull their delight in what is spotless and in the very beauty of holiness. The whole teaching of experience goes to prove that constant familiarity with evil will make its own evil impression. Did it prove so at that time with the church of Pergamos? The spirit of Balaam was amongst them; and as the counsel of that seducer was, "Get his people to sin against God, and then his divine protection will be withdrawn," so the fatal counsel to these persecuted Christians would be, "Deny the true God before the enemy, insult his name; then will the persecutor cease from his opposition, and your sufferings end." Their steadfastness could not be overcome by force, but it could be by craft. This was the old policy of Balaam, and the adoption of it in that church was rendered probable by harboring in it those deceivers who were still possessed of Balaam's spirit.

(5) The fifth aspect of this sin is that the evil is hateful in the sight of God. This is the worst of all. So grievous was it that it was specially mentioned. God's words were, "So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, *which thing I hate*." The evil is one which God hates; then how hateful it should also be in the sight of his people! If corrupters of the faith are continued in the Church, where is there a participation of God's Spirit? Where is there conformity with the charge, "Let the same mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus?" Where is the effort after the high attainment, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect"?

Looked at, therefore, from any and all of these views, we must be impressed with the great sin and danger of retaining in the Church persons who are corrupt and corrupters, persons whose whole influence is to spread error and sin in practice. To have them and to retain them amid the body of God's true followers is to encourage and strengthen them in their evil, to partake in some measure of their guilt, to manifest a satisfaction in their sin which ill becomes those who are sincere followers of our Lord, to run a fearful risk of becoming contaminated with the same impurities, and, above all, to continue in that which is known certainly to be hateful in the sight of God.

### 11. BALAAM.

There is hardly a character so strange in the whole Bible as is "this strange mixture of a man," as some writer has styled him. There are so many incongruities, so many things appar-

ently incompatible, that we scarcely know where to put him—whether to regard him as an inspired prophet of God, or as a great deceiver with splendid talents which he prostituted to ignoble purposes. Now we hear from him some of the most sublime utterances that ever fell from human lips; anon we see him crawling in a loathsome hypocrisy made up of boasting, covetousness, and cunning seduction; again he is seen plotting schemes by which to ruin a whole nation, and laying snares for the accomplishment of purposes absolutely diabolic.

What are we to make of a character composed of such contradictions? That he had some knowledge of the true God there is no question, and that God made some unusual communications to him is also certain. This is made evident by his dread of attempting anything which God had not commanded, by his accepting the rebuke imparted through the dumb beast, and by his sublime utterances concerning the Most High. Where did he get that knowledge, and who was he?

He is abruptly introduced into the narrative as "Balaam the son of Beor of Pethor." This takes us for his native place to the highlands of Mesopotamia, near the Euphrates, the ancient home of Abraham and Jacob, and at least eighteen days' journey to the far East. As to his knowledge of the true religion and the communications he received from Jehovah, we can conceive of three sources from which he received these superior advantages: (1) The fame of the great miracles which the God of Israel had wrought on behalf of his people at the Red Sea, at Sinai, at the smitten rock, at the battle-field with the forces of Bashan, and many others, must have filled the whole country and made a deep impression on him, a shrewd and observing man. (2) There must have been many traditions handed down from ancient times concerning the true religion, and God's intercourse with men in all that region where he resided, all of which he would carefully treasure up and use in connection with his profession of supernatural power. (3) There can be but little doubt that in Balaam there lingered some traces of the old religion of Abraham, and that, in a degenerate form, he assumed and made them the basis of his soothsaying, by which he had established a great reputation at a time when magicians had such wide influence. There is no doubt that he was a sorcerer of very great celebrity, and held in high esteem in all that country, where every form of soothsaying had such a hold upon the minds of the people. This may be seen from the fact that kings and princes resorted to him for

aid in times when extreme danger impended over them and their people. He was also a man of great ability, of fine poetic talents, capable of influencing others, and adroit in turning current events to his own personal advantage.

Such was the man to whom Balak, the king of Moab, had recourse when threatened with a great danger. Balak had unquestionably watched with deep solicitude the movements of the Israelitish people, their slow but steady progress toward his own borders, the miraculous victories they had gained over every enemy in their way, and the marvelous deliverances which had been wrought on their behalf by a power that without a doubt was more than human. They were now at the door of his kingdom; a battle with them was inevitable, and it was certain that his forces could not stand before them. What was he to do? What hope was there for him, excepting in some other soothsayer who could cope with Moses, the enemy's invincible leader? In that extremity he was directed to Balaam, the magician of the East, whose feats of divination were famed in all that region. Could that great sorcerer be induced to pronounce his malediction upon Israel, then his people might be saved. To inflict such curse upon an enemy when about to engage in battle was a common practice at that day. Accordingly, he sent ambassadors to Balaam, then residing in a place called Pethor in Mesopotamia, though it required a journey of eighteen days to reach him. They made that long journey "with the reward of divination in their hands," and found the great soothsayer. They besought him to utter the malediction, offering him unlimited reward, and in the name of their master endeavoring to conciliate him with flattering words. Then followed the strange scenes so familiar to every reader of Scripture: the ambassadors going back and forth over the eighteen days' journey between king and necromancer; Balak enumerating and offering everything that Balaam could desire in treasures, honors, or power; presenting sacrifices, prompted by avarice, offered upon altar after altar, as if they might influence the Most High to curse his people; the Lord most peremptorily refusing, and at the same time, by using the weakest and most unlikely instrument, preparing comfort for his people in the dark days that were coming upon them, endowing the stupid ass with the power of speaking what might well humble and terrify the covetous false prophet. Much as the heartless Balaam desired it, he was not permitted to utter the desired curse, but, instead of a curse, was forced to pronounce on Israel a blessing.

Foiled in the project of cursing, Balaam did not at once return to his Eastern home, but, lingering in the neighborhood of Moab and Midian, who were leagued together, he conceived another and, as he judged, a more effectual stratagem. At his suggestion Balak threw into the way of the Israelites the most alluring temptations to idolatry and lewdness. Assuming that neither he nor any one else could curse the Israelites so long as they remained faithful to Jehovah, Balaam would make them curse themselves by a wicked departure from the ways of righteousness. The stratagem succeeded only too well. Israel was ensnared by the impure and idolatrous worship of Baal-Peor, and in the visitation of God's anger therefor twenty-four thousand of the people were cut off by plague. The punishment of the covetous prophet was signal and sudden. The machinations of Balak brought on the very crisis he was striving to avert, and the hosts of Moab were routed with immense slaughter. Among the slain were the princes of Moab, and Balaam, who, instead of the rewards of divination, found a very different reward in the miserable death he suffered with the slaughtered enemies of Jehovah.

We can easily understand why, ever afterwards, Balaam was considered as the type of the seducer and the destroyer. The event itself, so terribly branded in upon the nation's history; occurring just at that crisis when they stood on the banks of the Jordan, ready to cross over into the promised land, but their arrival marked by the wailing of thousands of their families, the calamity being so deeply humiliating and so full of shame, and that without one comforting ingredient or one honorable thing to alleviate the sorrow; the certainty, more and more fully realized, that all had been brought on them by the atrocious schemes of the gifted but depraved prophet,—all these meeting in the event, conspired to make it memorable among the stirring scenes which had marked the annals of the chosen people.

What sad significance does this give to the charge in the message: "Thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling-block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication!" This was the doctrine whose aim was to deceive, seduce, and ruin. Balaam was to be the standing type of those who, through boasting, covetousness, and seduction, would bring down the judgment of God upon the churches wherein they were found. Alas! they are never wanting, but in every age they are found, the real antichrists who are ever the most baleful enemies of the

Church of Christ. The beacon warns us that throughout all time there would be those who would thus pervert their privileges and hold the truth in unrighteoushess.

### 12. THE NICOLAITANS.

Who were the Nicolaitans, whose doctrines and practices were so enormous in the sight of God? This question we have endeavored to answer already, and have only a few sentences to add in this place. They seem to have been a very corrupt sect of errorists that sprang up wherever the gospel was planted almost as surely as tares accompanied the first appearance of the growing wheat. Their radical error seems to have been their gross perversion of the gospel doctrine so clearly stated by Paul: "Ye are not under the law, but under grace"—meaning, of course, "Ye are not under the law *as a method of justification before God*, but under grace, through which alone can any be saved." Just as the depraved heart perverts everything, it perverted this, and made it teach that we are not under the law *as a rule of life*, but are free from its restraints, and hence obedience is a mere matter of choice. If we are not under the law, then we are independent of it, and free to sin as much as we wish; or, rather, there is no sin for believers, since it has all been pardoned already. This is a malignant root of evil that has sprung up in forms of antinomianism wherever the pure doctrines of grace have been inculcated. It is a masterstroke of Satan by which the grace of God is turned into lasciviousness. There could not be a more deadly error, nor one more common. It cuts the roots of all restraints and paralyzes all motives. So has it always been in fact. So was it with these Nicolaitans whose presence was such a sore evil in the church of Pergamos.

Their errors in doctrine led to practices that were guilty and vile. They yielded to the influence of the vilest passions. Especially did they regard fornication as a matter of indifference. "Meats sacrificed to idols, and fornication," was the common formula, the description of that vile conduct which was everywhere characteristic of these corrupters of the faith. When we have said that their evil practices were such that they cannot be named we have given the sum of all. This is the reason why again and again it is repeated, "which thing God hates." It is the reason why, of all erroneous sects, the Nicolaitans were the worst. It is the reason why the great charge brought against the church of Pergamos was that it allowed persons of this name

and character to remain amongst their members. It is also the reason why the warning against them is made so conspicuous in this great beacon of the ages.

Alas! the leaven of the Nicolaitans is even now working. We know this when we hear the plausible assertions paraded that the terrors of the law must not be preached; that nothing but "believe," "believe," must ever be heard; that love must be all; that the only sound ever uttered must be "come, come!" This is the old story. It is the perverting of most glorious truths. It is sapping the foundations.

### 13. IDOL MEATS AND FORNICATION.

A formidable stumbling-block in the way of the first converts from heathenism was formed by their constantly coming in contact with the question of the using of meats which had been sacrificed to idols. The first form of the trouble was in connection with the feasts given in honor of the idols at their temples, at which a large portion of the flesh of animals offered in sacrifice was consumed. Festivals must have been very frequent and attractive at Pergamos, where there were so many splendid temples of the gods. The fact is that much of the social life of pagan cities was connected with their idolatrous feasts.

There was still another great difficulty for the early Christians connected with meats that had been offered in sacrifice. Such meat formed the staple of ordinary entertainments in private families and among neighbors. Only a part of the animals offered in sacrifice was retained by the priests at the temple, and the remainder was returned to the offerer, who took it to the shambles, where it was sold as ordinary meat. Such meat would then, of course, be purchased by families and set on the table at their feasts. What were Christians to do when invited, as they would be, to such entertainments with their friends and neighbors? They were thus met with the idol meats at the temple feasts, at social entertainments, at family meals. Everywhere they had the same difficulty. They could not touch the meat set before them on any occasion without thereby sanctioning the idol sacrifices. To avoid it completely they must cut themselves off from almost all social life, and that with friends, relatives, and neighbors.

Another great sin—namely, that of fornication—was also essentially bound up with the festivals of the temples. It was not only not censurable, but at some of the temples it was a part of the worship. From the nature of the case the rites cannot be

described farther than to say that impure women were a part of the attendants of the temple. The rites were such that decency forbids that they be even named.

We can now see how very great were the dangers and temptations to the first converts in these pagan cities from these two causes—that is, from meats that had been offered to idols, and from fornication. To refuse to partake of such meats would almost exclude them from all social life. Nearly all the entertainments of such cities were the idol feasts, and most social meals had the same idol taint. Then, if the Christian were present at such feasts, either public or private, he would do so much toward countenancing idol-worship. If he did not attend, he became an outcast from all social life. The result was that many of them yielded to the temptation, joined in the pagan festivals, partook of the idolatry, and so proved recreant to their God.

This evil was the great stumbling-block in the early churches of Asia Minor. It was the root of all the sinful practices of the Nicolaitans. Of these there seem to have been three parties represented in the three churches—Pergamos with its Balaamites, Ephesus with its Nicolaitans, and Thyatira with its school of Jezebel. They all amounted to substantially the same thing, and had their plea in misrepresented Christian liberty. "The result," as one has well said, "was disorderly conduct under the cloak of liberty; the first specific mark of this disorderliness being a participation in heathen sacrificial banquets; the second, connected with the first, a sexual laxity amounting to actual unchastity." Another writer has presented the matter so well that we cite his words in full. In this church of Pergamos "there were evidently lawless persons who abused the doctrines of grace; who promised liberty, being themselves servants of corruption, and turned the grace of God into lasciviousness, enticing, like Balaam, his people to eat idol meats and to commit fornication. The eating of idol meats would, in such a city as Pergamos, be as great a stumbling-block as caste at the present day in India. To refuse to partake of things offered to idols was not only to renounce idolatry, it was more: it was to abstain from almost every public and private festivity, to withdraw in a great measure from the social life of the place. To kill and to sacrifice were almost identical, and while the rich feasted his friends, the poor man, after making his offering of a share to the temple, sold the rest in the market. But the sin of the Nicolaitans was not the eating of that which had been offered to the idol, and was then sold or used at private

entertainments: it was taking a place at heathen festivals in honor of the false god, and then pleading that they did it in Christian liberty, and that an idol to them was nothing, for they knew the whole system to be a fraud. With this stumbling-block we see how closely joined was the other. Here, as in the decree of the Council of Jerusalem, the two sins are spoken of together, for the impure character of heathen festivals rendered them almost inseparable, especially in an Oriental Greek city." Meats offered to idols and fornication were the type, the sum and substance, of the sinful doctrines and practice of the depraved Nicolaitans, some of whom were found in the church of Pergamos, were tolerated by that church, endangered its purity and peace, called down upon it this censure of the heavenly King with the two-edged sword, and caused its errors to find a place in the great beacon intended to be a warning to all the people of God so long as the Church would be in a militant state on earth.

### 14. ADMONISHED TO REPENT.

The church of Pergamos was in this dangerous condition of harboring the corrupt Nicolaitans with all their abominations. The marvel was that the glorious Head of the Church did not cut them off at once, but, on the contrary, called upon them to repent and to free themselves from such foul contagion. He calls upon the church, in which there were doubtless many who were his true followers. He calls upon the city, which had so many privileges and which might have risen so high in blessings and in Christian character. He calls upon the Nicolaitans themselves, as if they were not utterly hopeless, but might be delivered from these sorely debasing influences.

The call upon church, city, and heretical sect is to repent of their sinful courses and debasing tendencies. It was demanded of them that they should consider, should reflect upon the height from whence they had fallen, upon what they had once been, and then upon the glory to which they might yet attain. Surely it could not be that they would still harbor such corrupt and abominable influences! Would they only reflect upon what were the doctrines and practices of the Balaamites and Nicolaitans, surely they would expose themselves to their corrupting influences no longer!

*Repent* was the most solemn and earnest call upon that church whose highest interests were so greatly imperiled. Well might the church of Pergamos be called to repent, since the evil tend-

encies which they encouraged were abhorred by the all-seeing and holy God. Well might they be called upon to repent, since their sinful course was worse than even that of Ephesus itself, the wretchedness of which was so deeply deplored. *Repent* surely they would, did they only realize that they were harboring those enemies of the church and God and truth whose teachings were branded as utterly corrupt and corrupting.

Then the considering, the awaking to a sense of their sin and danger, must be followed by their turning from their course and at once casting out from their midst all those who followed the doctrines of the Balaamites and the Nicolaitans with their debasing practices. The great sin of the church consisted not only in their not detesting the corruptions of these flagrant transgressors, but also in dealing with them in kindness and retaining them among their number. Of this they must repent. It was a sin and a folly over which they might well lament in dust and ashes. Harsh as the sentence might seem, the true people of God must have no fellowship with a sect whose tenets were so utterly depraving. They must wash their hands from their evil practices and exclude them from an intimacy they had continued too long. Nothing less than utter separation would evince the sincerity of their repentance. However painful it might be to sever the ties which bound them to friends or neighbors or kindred, the transcendent moment of the cause required that the sacrifice be made. Repent! The demand is imperative. It must be heeded, or God be offended, souls be contaminated, and sore chastisements be brought down upon the offending church.

In this solemn call to repentance for affiliating with evil there was a far wider purpose than the mere interests of that church. The call was to sound out through the whole Church and down through the ages. It was to form an important ingredient in the great beacon that was to serve for the warning of all God's people to the end of time.

### 15. FIGHTING WITH THE SWORD OF HIS MOUTH.

The urgent call upon this church was to repent of the sin and thus escape the danger of retaining among their number persons who adhered to the seductive tenets of Balaam and the foul practices of the Nicolaitans, and to show their repentance by promptly excluding from their communion professed members whose presence must contaminate the whole body. Then follows the warning, so solemn as coming from the lips of the Amen, that if they

did not heed it the heavenly King would come quickly and "fight against them with the sword of his mouth."

There are three peculiarites in this figurative expression: (1) The first is the association with the sad history of Balaam which is called up by the connection of the church with those who were in spirit his followers. They were Balaamites, and the fate of that deceiver might well give them alarm. The warning is framed according to their own profession, and extended to those who held them in church-fellowship. Its meaning can be understood only by reference to him whose character they bore. The leading events in his ruinous career are made emblematic of the events which they might expect. Balaam's history is given so much prominence in the counsel and warning to this church because the central point, the very substance, of the message was the charge against it that it retained among its members those who were followers of his doctrines and practices.

(2) The second peculiarity of this strangely significant warning is the use of the expression "sword" as a symbol of the word of truth from the lips of God. This also, no doubt, arises from the scenes of Balaam's history, wherein he was confronted by the angel of God with the drawn sword. The appropriateness of this representation of the Word of God is also seen from another part of Scripture, where it is called the "sword of the Spirit." That divine sword can cut the soul to pieces. In accordance with this, in still another inspired utterance we read: "Therefore have I hewed them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth; and my judgments are as the light that goeth forth." The teaching of all this undoubtedly is that by the instrumentality of the truth, as by a keen, cutting sword, God would visit that erring church and wound it sorely unless prevented by its timely repentance.

(3) In the third place, he would himself thus effect that separation from the contaminating influence of those heretical teachers whom the church would not be persuaded to exclude from their number. This he would do by his Word, the sword of his Spirit, whose effort would be to convince, to persuade, and so to separate. The doctrines of Balaamites and Nicolaitans were that in which the great danger to the church was involved. The doctrines would be most effectually met by the truth. The word of truth was that against which they could not stand. Truth would show the absurdity of the tenets of their seducers, and raise a sentiment against them that would culminate in their exclusion from the communion

of God's true people. This would be the work of the Spirit warning against falsehood and corruption.

Such discriminating and exscinding power of the Word of God is plainly taught in both Old and New Testaments. In the one we see it in such passages as these: "And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver hath he hid me." In the other, the New Testament, we find such teaching as this: "The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in its sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." How effectual would such words be against the deceiving, seducing enemies that were lurking in that church! How thoroughly would it expose them, and how certainly would it arouse a feeling against them, that could be satisfied only by their exclusion from the fellowship of them whom they were seeking to seduce and corrupt! The two-edged sword out of the mouth of the Son of man was a most significant expression in the connection where it is here found. "What the seer beheld in vision was the expression of the truth that the message he was about to record would be conveyed in keen and piercing words, cutting through the ulcers of the soul, cutting off the diseased members, laying bare the inmost organs of the inner life, slaying those who deserved slaughter; but also wounding to heal, even slaying that he might raise from the dead." The word would cut deeply, and separate from the church those who by their presence would corrupt the whole body. By its two edges that sword would cure some and kill others, and so save the church.

Then the language of the message was such as to indicate that there could not safely be any delay. Its most pressing call was, "Repent, or else I will come *unto thee quickly*, and will fight against thee with the sword of my mouth." Quickly, unexpectedly, and in a most effective manner would God come and accomplish that separation to which the church was summoned, but would not heed. What dire calamities might be expected to accompany the irresistible work of the Holy Ghost as the church was sifted and purified! The analogy of the days of Balaam which has led us thus far may justly lead us still farther. The twenty-four thousand of Israel and those who sinned with

them, that lay bleeding in that slaughter, and the thousands more of Moab and Midian, with the deceived princes and the deceiving prophet among them, whose fate could never be forgotten, proclaimed what a fearful thing it is to trifle with the threatenings of the Most High God, and proved that the majesty of his Word shall be maintained, however great may be the tempest of battle that may thereby be aroused.

### 16. OVERCOME WHAT?

The "overcometh" in this message has an extent and permanence of meaning that the same word has not in any other of the messages to the seven churches. It indicates a contest which had been commenced in that church, which would go on through time, and the issues of which would be momentous. In this church that contest took on a definite form, and presented questions which could not be evaded, but which would come up again and again so long as the kingdom of our Lord should continue in a militant state. There can be no doubt but that this was permitted for an all-wise purpose. A practical question of boundless importance was awakened then, in the beginning, in order that the All-wise Spirit might give it an answer that was infallible and that should be heard at every turn of the never-ending contest.

The "overcoming" was then, was in all after-ages, is now, and evermore will be, in the contest with antinomianism in all its forms and degrees. Antinomianism, opposition to the law of God as a rule of duty, assumed a definite form in the church of Pergamos, and its atrocity in the sight of God was thus evinced so clearly that never more could there be any doubt as to its real character. The prevailing temptations to it were *the using of meats which had been sacrificed to idols, and fornication.* These temptations were very strong. To avoid the first required almost the total abandoning of all social life, for that ingredient of idolatry had wrought itself into nearly all the intercourse of society. As to the other, the prevalence of immorality, in addition to the ordinary attractions of sensuality, the whole worship was impure, and indulgence in the crime incurred no censure. Instead of lewdness being a crime, it was a part of the service of their impure deities and was incorporated with their ordinary worship. It would seem to have been almost impossible to remain a true and untainted Christian in such an atmosphere as that.

From this it will be seen how much was implied in the call to overcome the prevailing temptations in such a state of society

as that by which the church of Pergamos was surrounded. This was what the faithful must conquer. To rise above these elements of practical antinomianism was the more praiseworthy in the sight of God in that they were the first and great offences into which the early Christians ordinarily fell. Steadfastly to resist them was made the great test of true conversion from paganism to Christianity. Moreover, the contest with these was to be renewed from age to age. It is a struggle which, in all its essential elements, is required of the people of God even at the present time. Even now is the call made on us to overcome, and the promise is given of the richest reward if, faithful to our God, we prove ourselves conquerors, and more than conquerors, through Him that loved us.

### 17. THE HIDDEN MANNA.

To this tempted church of Pergamos were given two of the most blessed promises in the inspired Word—namely: "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written which no man knoweth, saving he that receiveth it." The two promises were substantially the same in the engagement they made to those who, being as sorely tempted as we can conceive possible, would yet be faithful to their heavenly Lord by overcoming all that could be plotted against them to lead them away from truth and righteousness. The two promises are given in order that, if possible, the latter may add to the blessedness which is made sure by the former. The repetition of the engagement serves to keep the mind lingering upon the gracious words of God, and so causes a deeper impression to be made. Besides, by presenting the promise in two different aspects additional features of it are brought out and its amazing riches are more clearly seen.

The resemblance of that which is promised to the self-denial through which the victory is to be won and the reward reached is one of the things which tends to make the message most startling. If the people of God would deny themselves by refusing to eat of the pagan meat, then their holy Lord would reward them by giving them to eat of the heavenly bread which would render their souls most blessed. Our adorable Father knoweth our frame. He is acquainted fully with our souls, and all their aspirations, and with every method by which they may be influenced. This is the way which he sees to be best in this case.

This establishing of a resemblance between the earthly fidelity and the spiritual and eternal recompense indicates a wisdom that is greater far than that of earth.

The question is thus answered why the special promise made to the faithful of Pergamos should be that of manna. The very word was calculated to stir up the souls of the patriotic Israelites as it took them back in their history to the days when Jehovah himself was their supreme leader. It told them of the time when, day by day, they were fed by the bread which God sent down from heaven. It renewed the blessed assurance of his help, and warranted in them the joyous anticipation that, as that food from heaven had been sent down to them in the wilderness, so would they in the days to come receive such spiritual nourishment as would be seasonable, abundant, refreshing, and directly from the hand of their ever-living Lord. That they should cut themselves off from the pagan festivals, with all their associations, was asking much; but this promise was more than a recompense, for it made sure to them the bliss of the Holy Spirit's constant presence with them as long as they might be continued on earth, and then the rapture of the new feast in the Father's heavenly mansion. Would not this more than make up for all?

The manna of the wilderness—we know what it was; but this spiritual manna—what is it? The blessing that was engaged to the faithful by it was doubtless twofold—namely, that spiritual nourishment of the believer on earth which the evangelical prophet describes when he exhorts, "Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness," and that celestial and eternal blessedness of the saint when, all the sins and sufferings of earth being over, his exalted Lord shall drink new wine with him in his Father's kingdom. Both of these were assuredly included in the promise, and both of them are still in store for those who are unflinching in their fidelity to their Lord.

Then what concerning this are we to understand when we hear it described as the *hidden manna?* Again are we taken back to the old days of Israel. The earthly manna was sent down from heaven, day by day, as long as it was needed; but then the supply ceased. It ceased, but the gracious consideration of Jehovah would not suffer its benefits to end at the same time. He made provision that its memory should endure and bless his people for evermore. To this end, though the ordinary manna perished after the day of its descent, he ordered a portion of it to be gathered and pre-

served as a momento, and he himself kept it from spoiling. His command concerning it was, "Take a pot, (a golden pot,) and put an omer full of manna, and lay it before the Lord, to be kept for your generations." In accordance with this command, a golden pot of the manna was put in the ark and kept for many a generation in the temple.

This element of the manna's history becomes significant when transferred to the spiritual manna which was promised to the faithful. Of old, the manna was laid up to be preserved for generations, and was never seen by human eye except by that of the high priest, and that but once every year. So the celestial manna is safely guarded for the faithful, as yet hidden from all save those who are priests of the living God.

When thus regarded, as now hidden or unknown by even true believers, this divine supply of blessings is to be regarded in two aspects: It first tells of the joyous experience of the child of God when, in conversion, he enjoys the bliss of passing from darkness into Christ's marvelous light; and afterward of the unknown and indescribable joy of the ransomed when they awake to the sight of the beatific vision. It is abundantly evident from all the Scriptures, both Old Testament and New, that God has laid up provision sufficient for all the wants of the soul in both time and eternity. The Bible is ablaze with tidings of this all over its sacred pages. What else means it that we read, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him"? What tidings are those from the celestial throne: "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is"? What marvels of revelation were those which were witnessed when the great New Testament prophet, in bitter tears that no other being could be found for the undertaking, beheld the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, prevailing to open the sealed book of providence, and to loose the seven seals thereof, and thus make known to the ransomed the mysteries which were contained therein! What rapture throughout all heaven as saints and angels beheld on its opening pages the sublime counsels and infinite glories of the Deity!

Then, too, the unknown joys of the soul at the time of conversion, and afterward, throughout all the believer's earthly career, contain two elements which can be distinctly traced: one, the

ravishing view of Christ which breaks out in the exclamation, "He is the chief among ten thousand!" The other, the bliss of knowing that sin is fully pardoned, and all danger of condemnation over for ever. Who can describe the rapture of the soul when Christ, hitherto hidden in his human nature, first breaks out in that effulgence a specimen of which was beheld in the glory of his transfiguration! Sometimes that bliss is so great that the soul wants, and can endure, no more. Until then the gracious Lord was hidden, and to the unrenewed heart was "as a root out of a dry ground; and had no form or comeliness." At the time when the soul passes from darkness into the marvelous light of God the intervening veil is taken away and the Beloved stands revealed as the chief among ten thousand, the Glorious One who is all that the convert needs or can desire. Then is he seen and enjoyed as the Bread of life, the all in all, the fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the hidden manna, but revealed for the satisfaction and strength of the new man.

From this cause, and from the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit upon the heart, it comes to pass that the sincere child of God is admitted into a blessedness of which the carnal heart is entirely ignorant. The secret of the Lord is revealed to such blessed ones even here. The happy believer, like his Lord, has meat to eat of which the world does not know. He begins to realize what must be the sweetness of angels' food. By the gracious Physician who came from heaven he has administered to him "the medicine of immortality." The world does not, cannot, know what he is permitted even now to enjoy. Sometimes he is raised so high on the mount of bliss, and has such ravishing views of his Lord, that, like Peter when blinded by the manifested glory of his Lord, he wants never to come down, but to stay and revel for ever in the heavenly glory. Neither is it joy alone which arises from partaking of this celestial manna, but the whole soul is strengthened and nourished thereby. It becomes the very aliment and life of the new man in Christ Jesus. The entire being is filled with it, and the saint increases in every one of the graces of the Spirit.

Such is the effect of the promised manna even in time; but there will be a fruition of it that will be infinitely better in the world to come. Its real value is hidden even from the believer in this present earthly and imperfect state. Only when we shall sit down with our exalted Lord at the heavenly banquet in his

Father's halls shall we know its full sweetness. Then, and not till then, shall it be fully known what the celestial portion is that is laid up for those who now deny themselves the sinful pleasures of earth. Animated by that glorious prospect, we may look through faith to the celestial throne, and there behold all the righteous dead, and all those who shall yet join them, awaiting in blissful prospect that better portion which their Lord is getting ready for them. They had refused the polluted meats of heathen temples and other sinful indulgences, and they have God's assured promise that they shall be admitted to the holy feast of heaven in the everlasting temple, the palace of the supreme King. We can imagine what will be some of its seraphic joys, but we cannot imagine the bliss that will come directly from Christ into the soul amid its inconceivable ecstasies. In the effort to fathom what that hidden heavenly manna must be, our best course will be to take our Lord's own words as our guide: "I am the bread of life; he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst." "This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof and not die; . . . . if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever." Can we read all this without being entranced at the prospect of that heavenly communion with Christ and with the holy and the blest?

Our whole souls are carried away in the prospect which the promise of the heavenly manna opens up to us in the eternal future. We shall see Jesus as he is, and through that beatific vision we shall be made like him; and this shall be to us the hidden manna which shall then be brought forth from the sanctuary in the immediate presence whence it had been so long withdrawn from sight. Then shall the glory of Christ, now shrouded and concealed, be revealed to his people in all its brightness. The righteous who are now beneath the throne awaiting the hour of blessed consummation shall then sit down with their Lord at the long-expected feast of immortality. The beatific vision shall burst upon them. They shall be filled with rapture immortal at the realization that they had been enabled by grace to resist the attractions of sense and sin, and now see before them only an eternity of full and most blessed satisfaction.

### 18. THE WHITE STONE AND THE NEW NAME.

It has already been pointed out as one of the peculiarities of these messages that in each of them there are two distinct promises

—one local to the particular church, and shaped according to its existing circumstances; the other addressed to the whole Church of God, of all times and places. In the present instance the first promise was the hidden manna, which we have just considered. The other promise—the promise intended for all Christians until the end of time—is that to those who should overcome sense and sin would *God give a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.*

There can hardly be a doubt that this promise refers to the ancient and beautiful custom of the *tessera hospitalis.* There were then no public houses of entertainment, and consequently the traveler on a long journey was under the necessity of in some way finding lodgement in private houses where he could spend one or more nights as he needed. Such a traveler has found a home with a kind family, and a strong attachment has sprung up between him and his host. The hour has come for him to depart, but he and his friend cannot separate without first interchanging some token of their friendship. For this purpose they use the well-known *tessera hospitalis* as a memento of the days of their intercourse and a pledge of the covenant of enduring friendship which they form.

This token was a small, four-sided (hence the name *tessera*), oblong piece, generally of stone, though sometimes of other material. This carefully prepared pledge was split into two equal parts, on the inner side of one of which the host wrote his own name, and that of the guest on the other. These parts were then interchanged, the guest carrying away with him the name of the host and the host retaining that of his friend. To render them still more significant and precious, and to prevent imposture in their use, they were preserved with the most inviolable care, being concealed so that the names on them were known to no mortal saving themselves. Thereafter they were always carried as the pledge of fidelity and means of recognition known only by the parties themselves. In all after-years the *tessera hospitalis* would open to each other the door of hospitality and secure instant confidence. Even death did not end their value, but they went down as the bond of friendship to children and grandchildren in all the future. They were perfectly inviolable, and bound the parties in the most secret, sacred, and enduring loyalty to each other. Every other conceivable bond might be broken—the *tessera hospitalis* never.

We give a reported instance of the observance of this custom.

In an ancient Greek writing we have this record: "Hanno inquires of a stranger where he may find Agoristocles, and discovers to his surprise that he is addressing the person of his search. "If so," he says, "compare, if you please, this hospitable *tessera*. Here it is; I have it with me." Agoristocles replies, "It is the exact counterpart; I have the other part at home." Hanno replies, "O my friend, I rejoice to meet thee; thy father was my friend, my guest; I divided with him this hospitable *tessera*." "Therefore," said Agoristocles, "thou shalt have a home with me, for I reverence hospitality." Beautiful illustration of gospel truth! The Saviour visits the sinner's heart, and, being received, as a guest, bestows the white stone, the token of his unchanging love. He enrolls our name among his friends. He makes an everlasting covenant with us, ordered in all things and sure. He promises never to leave nor forsake us. He tells us we shall never perish. He gives us the tessera, the white stone.

Such was, without a doubt, the custom to which there is here a reference. The white stone was a token of friendship and a pledge of fidelity in all time to come. So, to all who denied themselves for his sake, would God give a pledge of close, perpetual, personal, and inviolable friendship. This gracious engagement is made in such emblematic terms as are calculated to leave the deepest and dearest impression. It would seem that the Spirit of inspiration would not only impart that most blessed truth, but also do it in terms so striking and so multiplied that they would carry it home to the heart. This we believe was the fact, and we should follow his example in tracing its meaning.

We look first at the suitableness of the words for conveying the spiritual ideas—the emblem and pledge of God's divine friendship. In connection with this, incidentally, we have a corroboration of the authenticity of the Sacred Scriptures. The *white stone* —why is that particular thing used as God's testimony and pledge of his never-failing friendship—the emblem of the Earnest, the "witness of the Spirit?" Why is it especially used in this message to the Pergamese church? There is meaning in it. Says one of the most trustworthy of all modern travelers: "It is a remarkable fact that in the vicinity of Pergamos an unusual number of white stones cover the ground in every direction, and the traveler can hardly fail to be struck with the applicability of the words in which the Scriptural promise to this church is couched." Then most significant is it that it is a *white* stone. The word carries us up amidst the brightness and the purity of the skies, for

"*white* is everywhere the color and livery of heaven." Most remarkable is it that amid the revelations of celestial glories this description is so often found. We see the Son of God with "his head and his hairs *white* like wool, as *white* as snow." We have also, besides this *white* stone, the "*white* raiment," the "*white* robes," the "*white* cloud," the "fine linen clean and *white*," the "*white* horses," as well as the "great *white* throne." In other parts of Scripture it is of frequent occurrence; as, the angels in the deserted sepulchre of our Lord appearing in *white*, and the Ancient of days when seen in the vision of Daniel, "in garments as *white* as snow." In all these and similar expressions we find the word as indicative of purity, splendor, glory. So here, the *white* stone is the purity, the brilliancy, of God's witness to us of his favor.

Still another prospect is opened to us by the significant "*new* name." This hints at the shining glory that is coming. It is one of the key-words of the messages, as it is of the whole Apocalypse. "He who is the giver of this revelation everywhere sets forth himself as the only renewer of all which sin had made old; the author of a new creation even in the midst of a decaying and dying world; and thus we have, besides the "*new* name" here, the "*new* Jerusalem," the "*new* song," and the "*new* heaven and the *new* earth."

These are stirring words in the symbols. *New* and *white*, when thus used by our glorious Lord in connection with the events through which the faithful are yet to pass, are calculated to excite adoration in our souls. Higher, far higher, are we admitted into the heavenly mysteries when we find them associated with the white *stone* and the *new* name. These bring us into the core of the sublime promise. In the *new name* we have the key of the exalted mystery.

In scriptural phraseology the name means the person himself. It is the expression for the sum of all his attributes or characteristics. It is the embodiment of what he is. Hence the new name is the new man. Our promise here is another form for the gracious assurance, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." Then do we see the glory of the promise in that the victor over the temptations of the flesh has a new relation to God as his Father and to Christ as his Elder Brother and Friend, new prospects as co-heir with the Son of God in the heavenly reward once set before Him, new companions, even saints of the

Lord and angels ministering at the throne, and a new nature, so that he has become like the divine Son, and partaker of the heavenly glory.

Even a higher element still is there in the blessed promise. The precious *stone*, emblematic of "the witness of the Spirit," bearing witness with the spirit of the saint, is a wonderful gift—more precious that it is *white*, pure, glorious, heavenly; more precious still is the *name*—celestial, Christ-like; more precious still that it is *new*, above that of earth or ransomed saint; highest of all, that *no man knoweth it saving he that receiveth it*—beyond the experience of mortal, higher than human language can describe or heart of man can imagine. This is the climax; the promise is hidden in glory which cannot be described—so rapturous that nothing but experience of its glory can enable the ransomed soul to understand it.

In the expression, "new name which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it," we have the substance of the experience of the believer when first he passes from nature's darkness into God's marvelous light. Who of us has not seen and heard it? The true convert shows his joy in the radiance of his countenance. He wonders that he had not known this bliss of pardon long before. He cannot understand why every one does not see the unspeakable rapture of salvation and give all his heart to his Saviour. His constant trouble is that he cannot tell all the blessedness that he is finding in Jesus. As we listen we hear from him: "What means this joy of soul which I can scarce contain? Why did I not know of this blessedness before? Surely no other person has ever found such happiness in Christ." The very words of one such blessed saint were: "Oh that I could but let you know what I now feel! Oh that I could show you what I see! Oh that I could tell the thousandth part of the sweetness that I now find in Jesus! You would then think it worth while to make it your business to be religious. Oh, dear friends, you little think what Christ is worth! I would not now for a world—nay, for a million of worlds, be without Christ and pardon. Oh that you did but see and feel what I do! Oh, my friends, worldly pleasures are poor, poor, miserable things compared with one glimpse of the glory which shines so brightly in my soul!" We listen to such ecstatic joy of soul, and then we understand something of the meaning of this promise, "which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it."

All this is included in the promise of the white stone with the

new name. Then, when we are assured that, like to the earthly pledge, it secures the most dear and intimate friendship of Jesus —a friendship that never can be weakened by years of time or ages of eternity; a friendship that can be enjoyed at any hour; a friendship the blessedness of which is ready for us in all places— then is it any wonder we can aver that there is no other promise more precious than this, even amid the most glorious engagements of the heavenly world? The man who carried with him the secret *tessera hospitalis*, no matter where he was and no matter what the day or hour might be, was sure of a warm heart and an open hand from his friend who never could and never would be separated from him. Such is the assurance we have that the Friend that sticketh closer than a brother will always and everywhere be ready to protect, receive, and bless us! Such is the most blessed reward that is promised to the conqueror of sense and sin. Could we help it that over this promise of promises we have lingered so long, unable to tear ourselves away from the wondrous message from the Lord of the churches to the faithful champions of his cause in Pergamos?

# THYATIRA.

THE WHITE CASTLE.

## THE MESSAGE.

And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet *are* like fine brass;

I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last *to be* more than the first.

Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.

And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.

Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds.

And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he that searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.

But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, (as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak,) I will put upon you none other burden:

But that which ye have *already*, hold fast till I come.

And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations:

And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers; even as I received of my Father.

And I will give him the morning star.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

# CHAPTER XI.

## THE WHITE CASTLE.

### 1. THYATIRA.

In several aspects the message to the church of Thyatira is not so attractive as most of the others. The city itself has scarcely anything for which it was especially distinguished. It had no fascinating history extending back into the ages of antiquity, no renowned line of kings, no great events which left a peculiar impress upon the race, no splendid buildings which served as models for after-times, no great work of any kind to give celebrity to its name. On a beautiful plain of Asia it lay unnoticed amid its rampart of mountains, pursuing its arts of industry, while the other cities around it became celebrated by their storms of war and their bloodshed and woes of the battle-field. So also its church in itself was marked by no great events to give it distinction amid the annals of the divine kingdom.

The modern name given to this city by the Turks is *Ak-hissar*, or the White Castle. It received this name probably because of the great heaps of white marble which are found in its neighborhood, or possibly because of a broken-down tower which is a very conspicuous object that meets the eye as one approaches the ruins of the old city.

In the days of its glory Thyatira was one of the chief towns of the kingdom of Lydia, on its extreme border toward Mysia. It was situated on the old Roman road between Pergamos and Sardis, about forty-eight miles from Pergamos and twenty-seven from Sardis. A more beautiful location for a little city, away from the great arteries of life, amid mountains and streams and fertile plains, could not well be imagined. About sixty miles from the Ægean shore on the uplands between the rivers Caicus and Hermus, and on the southern slope of a mountain ridge, amid the affluents of the latter stream lay the city, specially interesting to us because of this message from the enthroned King. In the distance from it may be seen the peaks of the higher mountains; at their foot lies a most beautiful and fertile plain some twenty miles wide, near whose centre rises an amphitheatre of hills containing in its bosom the

favored city. A small affluent called Lycus flows by its side, and with other mountain streams carries to it abundance of pure and refreshing water. Almost as beautiful as Damascus, it lives amid that ascending region of Asia Minor. The gales from the distant plains and higher lands, the streams from the fertile hills, the rills from the uplands, and the verdure, fragrance, and shade of the cypress and other groves, all conspire to give to the spot the sweetness of an earthly paradise.

The approach to it from the west is peculiarly charming. With the sea some fifty miles behind us, on the distant north the vale of the Caicus, on the south the broad stream of the Hermus, and the little rivulets of the Lycus by our side, we ascend the higher lands toward the interior. We pass over a hilly but fertile region, a region rendered still more charming by the many streams and by the groves of oaks and acacias that bound our path on either hand. Hallowed memories of the past also render our journey still more enchanting. Over this very same road the beloved John, "the holy theologian," no doubt often passed, on the business of the kingdom, we draw near to the city which had been honored as the seat of one of the seven churches; and in the words of one who saw it in all its beauty: "The eye tracks across the plain the silver thread which marks the course of one of the affluents of the Hermus; and in the centre, nourished by its verdure, are crowded the white roofs of a wide-spread Turkish city, with here and there a minaret towering in the midst, and many a clump of tall cypresses raising their funereal plumes on high; while the whole is girt with a rich fringe of orchards and watered gardens over which the silver mist drawn up by the sun hangs in a thin, quivering cloud. This is Ak-hissar, 'the White Castle,' the ancient Thyatira."

As we journey on to enter the city, we pass on the left a public well around which are gathered loiterers enjoying the scented breezes, and on the right an old ruined tower, the hoary monarch of bygone ages. We pass on through a street lined on both sides with wretched houses at irregular intervals, and see minarets rising here and there, interspersed with tall, solemn cypresses, a great dome most conspicuous of all, and at a short distance beyond a rampart of hills that seem to lean against the clouds. Close inspection shows the streets to be narrow and filthy, and the houses to be mean and cheerless.

An American missionary, Rev. Pliny Fisk, who often visited it, thus describes the city: "Thyatira is situated near a small river, a branch of the Caicus, in the centre of an extensive plain. At the

distance of three or four miles it is almost completely surrounded by mountains. The houses are low; many of them of mud or earth. Excepting the motsellim's palace, there is scarcely a decent house in the place. The streets are narrow and filthy, and everything indicates poverty and degradation." Another of our missionaries gives a fuller description of its present condition: "The town is located in a plain of considerable size, and is hardly visible on being approached, by reason of the profusion of foliage. The plain itself is bounded on all sides by mountains, and cotton and madder, a kind of reddish root, are raised abundantly. I observed that this root is abundantly cultivated in all that region, and forms an important article of export for England, where it is used for dyeing purposes.

"The Christian traveller and missionary naturally looks for something interesting in a place where once existed a true church of Christ. But, alas, how sadly is he disappointed! The place presents an appearance nothing different from other Turkish towns. Everything wears a Mussulman aspect. The houses, streets, dress, occupation and language of the inhabitants all indicate a predominating Turkish influence. Christianity exists there in name, but it is the bare name; its spirit has long since fled. The Greeks, especially, seem to be peculiarly superstitious. I visited their church and found it to be full of pictures and other marks of a degenerate Christianity. A long string of these images, extending from one side of the church to the other, was suspended so low as to permit the worshipper to approach and kiss them; and so frequently had this adoration been bestowed on them, that all appeared soiled from the frequent contact of the lips. Over the entrance of the church, I observed the representation of a grave old man, with a silvery head, surrounded by angels. Suspecting the object designed to be shadowed forth, I inquired of a lad standing by what that figure meant? He instantly replied, 'It is God.' I observed two similar representations of the Deity in the interior of the church. The churchyard is used as a burying-place. Candles are lighted at the heads of the graves in the night, and incense is often burned. When the process of decay has proceeded so far as to leave nothing but the bones, these are taken up and thrown into a sealed vault, over which a chapel is fitted up, and in which mass is said over these relics of the dead for the benefit of their souls. A feeling of abhorrence came over me, as I stood in the place where such abominations are committed."

Arundell entered the city from the east, and he thus describes it: "The appearance of Thyatira as we approached it was that of a very long line of cypresses, poplars, and other trees, among which appeared the minarets of several mosques and the roofs of a few houses at the right. On the left a view of distant hills, the line of which continued over the town; and at the right adjoining the town was a low hill with two ruined windmills. Thyatira is a large place, and abounds with shops of every description. The population is estimated at three hundred Greek houses, thirty Armenian, and one thousand Turkish; nine mosques, one Armenian, and one Greek church. We visited the latter; it was a wretchedly poor place, and so much below the level of the churchyard as to require five steps to descend into it." "Very few of the ancient buildings," says another traveler, "remain; one we saw, which seems to have been a market-place, having six pillars sunk very low in the ground. I find by several inscriptions that the inhabitants of this city, in the days of heathenism, were great votaries and worshipers of the goddess Diana. The city has a very great convenience of water, which flows in every street, coming from a neighboring hill about a mile off, there being thousands of pipes to convey it to every part of it. As in many other places, the Armenians are the chief merchants here, bringing from Persia and selling sashes, handkerchiefs, and other goods. The business of the city is chiefly that of cotton wool, which is sent to Smyrna in large quantities." "It is this trade, the crystalline waters, cool and sweet to the taste, the wholesome air, the rich and delightful country, which cause this city so to flourish in our day, and to be more happy than her other desolate and comfortless sisters."

### 2. HISTORY OF CITY AND CHURCH.

As to the history of this city and church, it needs to occupy but little space. Indeed, but little is known concerning it. Compared with the cities of the other churches, it was of modern origin. Its admirable location seems to have attracted the special notice of Alexander the Great, as he swept through the country toward the conquest of Persia. Then, after his premature death, some of his generals returned to the place, and set about the work of building up its houses and walls. A colony from Macedonia was carried there, and the place grew rapidly into an important city. Other nationalities were attracted to it, and it afterward presented a singular medley of nations and races. The

names which are even now found on its monuments show that its population was made up of very diverse elements. There is no doubt that Greeks, Romans, Asiatics, Chaldeans, Jews and others were among those who formed the heterogeneous population.

The origin of the church can be conjectured only—but that with considerable plausibility. A hint in another part of Scripture gives a clew by which we are led to a tolerable degree of certainty as to the way in which the gospel was first carried to that people. That hint we have in Acts 16 : 14. For the first time, so far as we are informed, that that gospel was ever heard in Europe, Paul and his companions were engaged in publishing the good tidings. It was in the neighborhood of the city of Philippi in Macedonia, on the Lord's day, and to a little praying circle of devout women. They sat down and related the story of redemption by the blood of Christ. Among those true-hearted hearers was one whose name can never be forgotten. That name was Lydia; and the simple history concerning her was that she was "a seller of purple of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God." She listened, was convinced, converted, gave her heart to God, with her family, professed her faith in her new-found Saviour, and proved the sincerity of her love by the kindest hospitality to the missionaries who were engaged in the blessed work of the kingdom.

That this devout woman was the honored instrument of introducing the gospel of the blessed God into that city, one of the seven, is more than probable. That she was a person of means and influence, as well as zeal, is very evident from the narrative. Being in the trade of purple dyes, or purple vests, and being a resident of the place, there is scarcely a doubt but that she was in frequent intercourse with Thyatira, though a far distant Asiatic town. She would be there frequently, without a doubt. Then the glimpse of her zeal which we have at Philippi leaves scarcely a question but that she would tell her relatives and friends the blessed tidings of the Saviour she had found. This, no doubt, was the first glimmer of the true light amid that people. It would shine brighter and brighter, still other radiance being added from many a quarter, until the darkness was broken and the light of truth established.

Though Thyatira is a city of recent origin as compared with some others of the seven, yet it has stood for at least *twenty centuries*. For two thousand years has it been a city; and it is

still a place of some importance. The number of habitations that are assessed is about two thousand. Of these, seventeen hundred and fifty are inhabited by Turks, three hundred by Greeks and thirty by Armenians. Thus, making the usual estimate of five persons to the household, this would give a population of eight thousand three hundred and fifty Turks, one thousand five hundred Greeks, and one hundred and fifty Armenians, or, in all, *ten thousand persons*. But there are also, probably, about one hundred and fifty habitations which are mere huts, that do not pay any tax. These would contain seven hundred and fifty persons more; and so, the whole population numbers about ten thousand seven hundred and fifty souls.

The business of the place has also remained nearly the same through all these ages. The occupation of Lydia is the occupation of its inhabitants still. When Seleucus Nicator, a successor of Alexander, brought thither his military colony, planted the city and gave it the name of his daughter, Thyater, he intended merely to make it a strong military post, but very different became its destiny. The quiet pursuits of industry, and not the confused noise of marching armies, distinguished it from the first, and distinguish it still. In the peaceful arms of its surrounding mountains it lies in repose. The country around it is peculiarly adapted for the production of cotton, and of a root that is used in making scarlet dyes. These two industries, accordingly, are the chief occupation of its people. Its scarlet cloths are famed throughout all the land, and, with its cotton, are sent in large quantities to the Smyrna market.

The traveler is impressed by certain things in Thyatira that are very singular, and peculiar to it alone. Among them is its language. This is Turkish, the language of the whole country; but in writing it the Greeks use their own Greek characters, as the Armenians also use the Armenian.

We are told of a singular kind of bread which seems to be a peculiarity of Thyatira. It is made in thin, flat cakes, not much thicker than brown paper, and is sold by the yard; when eaten, it is either doubled up or several folds of it are placed together.

In perhaps no other part of proconsular Asia is there so much wretched superstition as here. The worship of its nominal Christians is little else than a mass of gross credulity. It would seem to be impossible that human beings could stoop to such stupid infatuation. Some of the names of our holy religion are there; but the ideas are not imagined. Strings of saints and angels in

childish pictures, and abominable representations of the Deity, are all the objects that fill their churches. The only effect of their worship must be to amuse and degrade. This is the character of their Christianity; but only a small portion of the population profess even that. There is but one Greek church, and one small Armenian congregation. All the rest of the people are Mohammedans, insomuch that no less than nine minarets are seen towering up amid the cypress trees.

### 3. APOLLO ITS DEITY.

At the time of the messages, the chief object of worship in the city was Apollo, whose worship had been introduced by the Macedonians when they established the colony. They gave to him many names and adored him as the Sun-god. As Diana in Ephesus, and Æsculapius in Pergamos, so his temple and services gave character to all the religious rites and ceremonies of the city. His statue of ivory and gold, richly gilt, shone with a dazzling brightness, as became the god of the sun. In accordance with this and as a rebuke to the idolatry, Christ, the Son of the Highest, is described as the true and infinitely brighter glory, with "eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet like fine brass." The message, as were all the others, was framed according to the peculiarities of the place and the people to whom it was sent.

Apollo was the recognized deity of the city, and his statue and temple adorned it as the capitol of his worship in that land; but other pagan deities had also a subordinate position. The old coins of the city are impressed with the effigies of Bacchus, Minerva, and Cybele; but the principal deity of the city appears to have been the Sun-god, introduced by the Macedonian colonists. We are also told that "there was outside the walls, in the midst of an enclosure called the Court of the Chaldeans, a small temple dedicated to a sybil, Sambethe, an Oriental object of idolatry, said to have been introduced by the Jews of the dispersed tribes from Chaldea or Persia." Diana, especially had many devotees, and perhaps this arose from the fact that the city was surrounded, at the distance of a mile or two, by hills; for one of her attributes was that she reigned over hills. In those days Diana was honored as the patron goddess of their hills, and their veneration for that imaginary deity is illustrated by many inscriptions discovered on mouldering stones and columns in the city and neighborhood—on one of which she bears the title of "Diana Montana." An

ancient monument has been found there which is described as having been erected in honor of one of her priestesses, named Ulpia Marcella, by the senate and people; and on a broken stone in a wall, near a fountain, is traced the remains of an inscription, "To Diana, Goddess of the Mountains."

The present condition of this city, both socially and morally, is known with a considerable degree of fullness. As we have already stated, it has a population of ten or twelve thousand souls; and, as in the days of Lydia and the Apocalypse, it is still celebrated for its purple or scarlet dyes. The scarlet coloring, the material for which grows abundantly in the neighborhood, gives it a considerable trade, as does also the cotton which is cultivated in all the surrounding country. It is now a well-to-do market town.

Its religious condition may be inferred from what we have already stated, that it contains nine mosques, and, besides a small Armenian, a Greek church. Quite significant is it that the pure light is again beginning to shine in that region of deep darkness. Our American missionaries are there, carrying the glad tidings from a land the very existence of which was not known at the time of the messages. They have a little church, with its pastor, and a school for the boys and girls of Thyatira. Glorious truth that, even after so many centuries, the name of Him "who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass" should still be adored!

### 4. TITLES OF CHRIST.

One of the peculiarities of the arrangement of the messages is the correspondence, in each of them, between the title given to the heavenly Lord and both the chief idol of the city and the circumstances of the church to which the message is addressed. The title contrasts the divine King with the idol to show that he is the true and all-perfect Lord. It is also contrasted with the pagan deity, to bring out in a clearer light His supreme and infinite glory.

In the present case the divine title has undoubtedly a reference to the chief pagan deity of Thyatira, and to the condition of its church which called forth the message. There is a double title —the first one being "*The Son of God.*" This is the first place in the messages where this name is given to the Lord of the churches. There must be a reason for this. At least one good reason we can clearly discern. He is the Son of God—the Only-

begotten of the Eternal Father; the possessor of the divine name and nature; the co-equal of the almighty and everlasting Jehovah. Hence he is himself divine and possessed of both the right and the power to condemn the sin in the church, and to execute the penalty it provoked. Even the word God is not used without significance, in order that the majesty of Him with whom they had to do might be more deeply impressed upon the church. As God—the Son of God—he was supreme; hence the sin of the church was committed against his divine authority, and would necessarily call down upon it the execution of his divine justice. He was God, the only living and true God; and the sun-god, Apollo, even in all the splendors by which he could be surrounded, was but a senseless idol, an insult to Jehovah and a delusion to his votaries. The very name, *Son of God*, gives reality and power to the rebuke which the great sin of the people was calling down upon them.

The divine titles that are used here, without a doubt, had reference to the chief idol of the city; but, still more significantly, to the sad condition of the church which had called for this message. They were used in accordance with the central point which is the burden of the communication from the throne. The eyes were bright and penetrating, like a flame of fire; the feet were dazzling as liquid brass that was flowing out of the furnace. Those burning eyes could pierce through the pretenses of the seducers who, in the guise of zeal for the truth, were leading the church down into the depths of corruption. That clear sight could penetrate every plausible excuse for yielding to the allurements of sin and sense. That keen vision, cutting through hearts and reins, could lay open all pretenses of temptress and victims. In the clear and comprehensive words of Dr. Craven: "The eyes of flame are not only indicative of spirit-searching power, but also of the wrath of the Son of God, the Husband of the Church, flaming against those guilty of spiritual as well as physical adultery."

The feet, like molten brass, have also a terrible significance as they describe the Son of God in his relation to the church and its tempters. Most impressive is the description here given of Christ, "His eyes like flaming fire, and his feet like burning brass;" denoting thereby his piercing sight to discern his enemies, his fiery indignation and fierce wrath ready to take hold of them, and his irresistible power and strength to vanquish and tread them under his feet. His feet, like the dazzling glow of melted brass, no doubt indicated his majesty as he moved among the

churches. They also told of his irresistible power, by which he could subdue and tread under foot all his foes. Then also, those burning eyes, flashing in wrath, would scorch and destroy the evil, and the evil ones, who would corrupt his cause. The whole description—the Son of God, the burning eyes, the gleaming feet of brass—told of his majesty, his justice, his holiness, and his peerless glory.

### 5. COMMENDATIONS.

As in the other messages, the tender consideration of our Lord is seen here in cheering the church by expressing his approbation of whatever goodness he found therein, before he condemned the evil in it which called forth his censure. To make this praise the more emphatic, he places it first, as if it were congenial with his nature to praise rather than blame.

He assures them that their good works are not overlooked or forgotten. The name he took, and the words he spoke, were clearly intended to cheer and strengthen them. His eyes of burning brightness could penetrate to the love of their heart, as well as to the work of their hands. No good thing which his Church has performed for his cause is unnoticed by him who is the tender and considerate Lord.

In order to make his words of commendation the more emphatic, he specifies, in full detail, the various virtues on account of which he greatly loved them. Of these, he places first their works of charity, or love—love to God and their fellow men—love which led them to relieve their Christian brethren whenever they found them in distress. He assures them that his gracious eye was fixed upon them while they were engaged in that devoted service. He specifies next that faith, or fidelity, which led them to adhere steadfastly to their profession at any risk or sacrifice. Next he applauds their patience in enduring much persecution for the sake of that name which was, to them, above every other name or motive. Their good works, unwearying service, and unfaltering zeal, and faith that never doubted, were all distinctly before his loving eye, and made them dear to his heart. Their past course was approved in his sight, and their works at the present time were still beheld faithful and devoted before him.

Most rare and wonderful is the testimony of the Lord to the character of that church, namely, that "the last works were more than the first." They excelled them, not only in number, but also in their character of tender devotedness. These were most

encouraging words to that sorely-tried but faithful people. They must have been eminently comforting to them. We can hardly conceive of anything which would have been more so. Instead of declining in faith, and love, and good works as so many others were, they were improving in all the graces of the Spirit. An old commentator described the Heaven-approved course of this church: "Her special and peculiar commendation was this: 'that her last works were more than her first;' that is, her last works were better, did exceed and excel the first. Ephesus was best at first, and worse at last; but Thyatira's last works were best. It is a blessed thing when Christians grow in goodness, increase in holiness and obedience, when their last days are their best days; their last works, and their last fruit, their best, their fairest fruit." In the same spirit, a modern writer holds up the bright example of Thyatira: "Those works which have been recently performed are more numerous, and more commendable, than those which have been rendered formerly. That is, they were making progress; they had been acting more and more in accordance with the nature and claims of the Christian profession. This is a most honorable commendation, and one which every Christian, and every church, should seek. Religion in the soul, and in a community, is designed to be progressive; and, while we should seek to live in such a manner always that we may have the commendation of the Saviour, we should regard it as a thing to be greatly desired that we may be approved as making advances in knowledge and holiness; that as we grow in years we may grow alike in the disposition to do good, and in the ability to do it; that as we gain in experience we may also gain in a readiness to apply the results of our experience in promoting the cause of religion."

This strong commendation from her Lord puts Thyatira in that respect at the head of the churches, and, at the same time, makes the sin of those who would pull her down from that blessed eminence all the more flagrant. How great the contrast with Ephesus, where the deplorable charge was: "Thou hast left thy first love!" How painful the contrast with so many churches and so many individuals at the present time, with whom at first all is ardor, and zeal, and rapture; but soon the zeal is gone, the love is cold, and the brightest prospects and purposes all clouded! How needful this caution from the great Beacon that was to flame on high and afar in every generation! Oh that on the frontal of every church door, and as the motto inscribed on every heart, were the inspired words: "Giving all

diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity."

The wonderful thing in the message here, and the thing which is most encouraging, is that the God of the Church gives such minute attention to the good works, and even the praiseworthy shades thereof. Though he be engaged in directing the most sublime events of his world-wide kingdom, though the destiny of archangels be at his disposal, and though the reins of the universe be in his hands, yet does he notice the thoughts and words of the most humble of his followers. The steadfast love of those persecuted believers of Thyatira is written in the book of life, and its precious story is ordered to be rehearsed in every generation of the Church of earth, and will be one of the blessed themes in the regions of glory. Not a tear was shed by them in the trials they suffered in God's service, not a loyal word they ever spoke for him, not a cup of water they gave to the weary sufferers in his cause, not a purpose they formed for honoring him before men, but he carefully noted, and laid up in everlasting remembrance.

### 6. CENTRAL POINT.

It was a devoted church, and worthy of the strong commendation which it received from the enthroned King in such emphatic words; but there was one fatal blemish. Its piety was sincere, its good works above doubt, its fidelity worthy of the highest praise; but, alas, there was a "notwithstanding"! The blazing eyes of Omniscence saw this also, as well as that devotedness which was its glory. The dreadful handwriting which must for ever stand against it was—"Notwithstanding, I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols." This was the sad central point of the message. It was the one thing against that otherwise excellent church. Everything else that was laid to its charge clusters around this. It was the burden and source of all. It was the great blemish which called forth the special message from heaven to that people among whom there was so much to praise.

But what precisely was the sin which was involved in it—"Thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a

prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols." Plainly it is implied here that by letting this temptress alone, they were virtually encouraging her in her detestable course. Tolerating, or countenancing, the evil was the sin which was so grievous in the sight of the heavenly Lord. It was not—mark it well!—that the church, as such, had fallen into that foul system of evil; but that she harbored and tolerated, and so, at least tacitly, encouraged it in her midst. By so doing, that people was aiding a system which was the embodiment of a great evil, and which was strong, influential, and malign. It bore the name of Jezebel, and was a system of seducing idolatry which was tolerated, encouraged and growing in Thyatira.

The defect in the church was faithfully told, and all the resulting evil laid to its charge. In a very important aspect the evil in it was worse than that in Pergamos: for there it was only not cast out, while here it was encouraged, by affiliation with it. The evil system was suffered to remain, to be active, and to endanger the purity and life of the whole church.

### 7. JEZEBEL.

The section upon which we now enter is an important and a very difficult one, inasmuch as it involves the question, as to who or what was meant by the expression, "Jezebel." There are three leading answers to this question, each of which is founded upon plausible considerations and advocated by commentators whose names bear much weight.

We notice, first, the theory that by Jezebel was intended a certain woman of Thyatira who taught heretical doctrines, indulged in immoral practices, and had great and destructive influence. The name Jezebel is given to her because of her likeness to that infamous woman in Jewish history. The term *σοῦ τὴν γυναικά*, "thy wife," not "the woman," (a doubtful reading found in two MSS.) is used to fortify this opinion. The theory is that she was the wife of the bishop of Thyatira, and that fact made her conduct the more atrocious, while it rendered her influence the more destructive. Her influence over her husband, and, through him, over the church, was most malign, and, if unrestrained, would soon blight a prospect otherwise so encouraging.

The objections to this theory are, first, that it assumes that there was a diocesan bishop there, of which there is no evidence, and which we believe was not the fact. Second, the fact of a special

message being sent down from heaven to that church was too momentous to be accounted for by the teaching or practice of a single individual, whoever that might be. There must have been in the church an evil more grave than that, to have called down the divine warning and threatening contained in the message. And again, the expression, *τὴν γυναικά*, wife, bride, has a fixed, technical signification in the Apocalypse which forbids this application of it. It is in other places used to designate a body of people—the Lamb's wife—the Church. Like the word "harlot," it is used for a system or class of people, but not for an individual. For these reasons, we cannot accept the explanation of the term Jezebel as an individual, the wife of the bishop of Thyatira, or any other person whatever.

A second opinion is that by the word Jezebel was intended a certain popular goddess, a sibyl, called Sambethe—a temple to whom stood outside the city walls in an enclosed grove, known as "the Court of the Chaldeans." She was sometimes called the Chaldean sibyl, sometimes the Persian sibyl, and sometimes the Jewish sibyl. The supposition is that her worship had been introduced by the Jews of the Dispersion from their banishment in Chaldea, and that her popularity arose chiefly from her being a bond or symbol of the amalgamation of the many races and religions which were known to exist in Thyatira.

The fact of the existence of Sambethe, her temple and worship, and her great influence, was very curious, and this explanation is very plausible. But it does not come up into full accord with the magnitude of the evils that were censured in the messages to the other churches, nor to the graveness of the condemnation which is expressed here. Something worse than that polluted union was evidently intended.

We are therefore led to another, and what we believe to be the true explanation, namely, that the reference is to the real Jezebel, whose name occupies such a dark page on the Jewish history. We are but too familiar with the humiliating story of that wretched woman, daughter of the Sidonian king and priest—sinfully married by the weak and wicked king Ahab of Israel, mother of Jehoram, king in Jezreel, grandmother of Ahaziah, king of Judah, herself priestess of Baal, murderess of Naboth with his innocent sons, persecutor of the servants of the true God, slaughterer of the priests of Jehovah, and bearer of a name of horror from her shocking death.

She was the wife of Ahab, a woman of vast influence over her

husband, an influence which was uniformly exerted for evil. She was a daughter of Ethbaal, king of Tyre and Sidon. She was an idolater, and induced her weak husband not only to connive at her introducing the worship of her native idols, but to become an idolater himself, and to use all the means in his power to establish the worship of idols instead of the worship of Jehovah. She was highly gifted, persuasive, and artful; was resolute in the accomplishment of her purposes, ambitious of extending and perpetuating her power, and unscrupulous in the means which she used to execute her designs.

Such was the person to whom there is reference in this message. So infamous was her name, so evil her influence, and so shocking her end, that Jezebel became a marked object in the Jewish history and she was held up as a type of seducers to all that was base and destructive. She was the symbol of seduction to idolatry, and all that was vile and cruel. Until her time the worship of calves had been the extent of the departure of the ten tribes from the divinely-appointed institutions. The true God was worshipped still, the law of Moses was allowed to be kept, however there might be a certain amount of sinful will-worship mingling with and spoiling it. But from the time of Ahab's marriage to the daughter of Ethbaal the apostasy of Israel assumes altogether a different character. The guilt of it is of quite another and deadlier kind. A fanatical promoter of the Baal-worship, overbearing with her stronger will the weak will of her husband, animated with the fiercest hatred against the prophets of Jehovah, the last witnesses for him in Israel now that the Levitical priesthood had been abolished, she seeks utterly to exterminate these. She was probably herself, like her moral namesake here, a false prophetess—a priestess of that foul enthusiasm.

From Jezebel as its symbol, there seems to have been a class of persons in Thyatira who were striving to corrupt the whole church. As the devout commentator, Rev. Thomas Scott, describes them: "They were a company of persons, of the spirit and character of Jezebel, within the church, under one principal deceiver, as the Roman Antichrist is represented by the emblem of an abandoned harlot. Jezebel, a jealous idolater, being married to the king of Israel, contrary to the divine law, used all her influence to seduce the Israelites from the worship of Jehovah into idolatry, with which the vilest licentiousness was connected; and this served to increase the temptation. The

character and evil influence of Jezebel made her name a fit symbol of what they were. Those bearing the name were doubtless the heretical party which had crept into the church, similar to the Nicolaitans at Pergamos who pleaded for occasional conformity to their pagan neighbors. They admired architecture and statuary, and there could be no harm in seeing an idol temple. They loved music, and where could they hear it in such perfection as there? They were men of *taste*, too, and where could their taste be so highly gratified with the richest viands and the choicest wines? Or, they wished to cultivate good fellowship with their neighbors, and to oblige their kindred and friends; and what so likely to do this, as occasionally associating with them in their devotions, though they might not worship their idols in their *hearts*. "And besides"—might these complaisant Christians say—"perhaps they may be induced to attend at our services in return, and who knows but they may be converted?" These and a thousand other plausible excuses might be made by these Jezebel professors, to cover or to palliate their sins.

It is interesting as well as instructive to know precisely what these followers of Jezebel were, what they professed, and what they did. Like her whose name they bore, and who claimed that she was a prophetess, they no doubt professed to have superior knowledge—to be advanced thinkers, and to have made higher attainments than others in the interpretation of the divine Word. As did all those early apostates from the simple faith, they claimed that the eating of meat which had been offered to idols, and the commission of fornication, were matters of utter indifference. In this way they soon became guilty of both spiritual and carnal adultery, and sanctioned their guilt by what they maintained were the approvals of conscience—the constant refuge of all apostates, in both old and modern epochs of Church life.

Lewdness, in its various forms and degrees, seems to have been the first and greatest departure from the purity of the faith in all the early churches. Baalamites, Nicolaitans, and followers of Jezebel were all one in this. False prophecy, idolatry, and fornication are the first corruptions that are seen as the simplicity and purity of faith departs. This is a sad and most significant fact in the Church's earliest days.

As has been said, with truth no doubt: "The individual traits of the description of Jezebel in this message call for the

conclusion that in Thyatira there existed a school of antinomians which was so atrocious that the impure intercourse of the sexes was reduced to a religious system and clothed in the garb of piety." Its name was symbolical, teaching that what the corrupt Jezebel was, such was also the sect. It should be observed that the seduction to fornication occupies the foremost place in this instance, and that much more stress is laid upon it than upon the eating of idolatrous sacrifices. It has the first place, but it is intimately connected with that other corruption. This conjunction, together with the distinct reference to the Old-Testament Jezebel, implies that the fornication itself was connected with idolatry. False prophecy, fornication, and idolatry were all symbolized by the woman Jezebel, and so, as a type of them all, she is spoken of *as a seducing sect in Thyatira.*

It is certainly very significant that in these messages the great corruptions which had crept into the churches were represented by Nicolaitans, Balaamites, and Jezebelites. No doubt is left that Jezebelites, Balaamites, and Nicolaitans were substantially the same —all libertine sects, disclaiming the obligations of the moral law; all starting with a denial that Jesus Christ was come in the flesh, and that in the flesh therefore men were to be holy; all alike false spiritualists, whose high-flying pretensions did not hinder them from ending in the foulest fleshly sins—or which rather were themselves the means of entangling them therein. Can we doubt, from all this, that as Balaam was the predecessor of the False Prophet, so Jezebel was the predecessor of the Great Harlot who occupies a place of such awful prominence in the prophetic annals of the Apocalypse?

### 8. SPACE FOR REPENTANCE.

A very remarkable item is here introduced into the message. The words in which it is conveyed are: "And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not." Why is this local incident in either the old Jewish Church, or in that of Thyatira, or both, introduced here amid great general facts and doctrines of the kingdom? Was it not that that peculiarly aggravated and dangerous form of sin might be held up to special detestation, and so made a conspicuous element in the Beacon that was for ever to serve as warning as well as encouragement?

Certain it is that it came in naturally because of a similar event in the wretched career of the Jezebel of old. After she had been guilty of the atrocity of leading her husband to the murder of

Naboth and his unoffending sons, she yet was granted a space for repentance. We would have looked for the wrath of Heaven to come down upon her and the guilty king at once; but instead of that, they are granted time for repentance. Fifteen years were allowed the guilty monarch and his infamous queen before the sentence was executed. Moreover, in a most impressive way were they shown that God was willing to pardon. At first, Ahab gave some tokens of an active conscience. The hopeful symptom recorded of him was: "And it came to pass, when Ahab heard these words, that he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly." Jehovah was more than willing to meet these indications of true penitence. His divine forbearance was shown in the record: "Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me? Because he humbleth himself before me, I will not bring the evil in his days; but in his son's days will I bring the evil upon his house." Such was the instructive event in the old national history.

It is more than probable that in Thyatira at the time of the message there was some similar instance of the divine forbearance. We infer that in that church the prevailing evil had been of long standing; that God, by his servants, had warned the people against it, and that he had given them time for repentance, but they had sinned on until they could be borne with no longer. The church did not, would not, repent. It repented not, and showed no disposition to abandon its sinful course. Now all plea of having no time to repent was taken away, and it became inevitable that the divine wrath should inflict the threatened doom.

The danger of such delay of repentance was thus made manifest for the warning of all future ages; but so also were displayed gloriously the wonders of divine forbearance. They were so exhibited as to form a brilliant element of the Beacon of the Ages. As if in characters of heavenly light, they displayed how great, how immeasurable, the patience of God toward the lowest, the worst, the vilest of sinners. They have space given for repentance; they have urgent appeals to turn from their evil courses; they have judgments threatened if they do not repent; but if, after all, they prove incorrigible and hopeless, then nothing remains but to let the sword fall.

The fact is that the space given for repentance is misconstrued. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." The fact that punishment does not at once overtake

sinners is constantly misconstrued by them as an evidence that it never will overtake them, and that God does not see, or, seeing, does not care to avenge. Christ opens out here another aspect under which this delay in the divine visitations may be regarded. The very time during which ungodly men are heaping up for themselves wrath against the day of wrath, was a time sent them for repentance. The divine explanation is; "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." And thus his remonstrance with them is: "Despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? but after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath, against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deed."

There is no doubt that to warn of this great danger of delaying repentance is the leading purpose of this part of the message. It is manifestly a sin—a very great sin—to put off the time of repentance, when God gives an opportunity for it, and call for its improvement. Is it not trifling with God's patience, and contemning his goodness which he is marvelously exercising, and slighting his authority which should be our supreme law, and presuming upon his forbearance as if it were our right, and defying him by challenging his displeasure? It is great folly, as well as a great sin; it is also most dangerous, because it is running a fearful risk that while the work of repentance is delayed, the opportunity for it may be cut off for ever.

### 9. PUNISHMENT THREATENED.

The whole story is repeated in these solemn words. Time for repentance was granted to this erring people; it was not improved; their evil courses were continued; forbearance was finally exhausted—and then there remained nothing but punishment threatened, inevitable and fearful. That punishment had been held back as long as it was possible; and now, when it must come, like the sin indulged, it would be fearful. The whole history is so well depicted by Dr. Adam Clarke, that we repeat his appropriate words: "'Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation.' This, without doubt, alludes to the history of Jezebel. Ahaziah,

her son, through his mother's evil instruction and example, followed her ways. God punished him by suffering him to fall down —as is supposed, from the top of the terrace over his house—and so to be bed-ridden for a long time under great anguish, designing thereby to give him time to repent; but when, instead of that, he sent to consult Baalzebub, then Elijah was sent to pronounce a final doom against his impenitence. Thus the son of Jezebel, who had committed idolatry by her advice, was long cast into a bed of suffering, and, not repenting, died. In the same manner the sacred writer threatens the Jezebel of Thyatira, to make that wherein she delighteth, as adulteress in the bed of lust, to be the very place, occasion, and instrument of her greatest torment. So the bed is made a symbol of tribulation and anguish of body and mind. The language threatening her impenitence is terrible. The punishment, whose preface 'Behold' indicates its severity and speediness, is in its experience conformable to the sin, just as the cup of intoxication is poured out for the intoxicated. A bed of torment corresponds with the bed of fornication. 'Behold, I will cast her into a bed.' Not into a bed of ease, but a bed of pain. There is evidently a purpose to contrast this with the former condition. The harlot's bed and a sick-bed are thus brought together, as they are often in fact in the dispensations of Providence and the righteous judgment of God. One cannot be indulged without leading, sooner or later, to the horrid sufferings of the other—and how soon, no one knows. 'Into great tribulation.' Great suffering; disease of body or tortures of the soul. How often, how almost uniformly, is this the case with those who thus live. Sooner or later, sorrow always comes upon the licentious; and God has evinced by some of his most severe judgments, in forms of frightful disease, his displeasure at the violation of the law of purity. There is no sin that produces a more withering and desolating effect upon the soul than that which is here referred to; none which is more certain to be followed by sorrow and suffering."

There seems to be an accumulation of terrors in the punishment threatened the apostatizing people. It was first casting into a bed of suffering. It was then "great tribulation." And still farther it was, "I will kill her children with death." This was a strange and most ominous collection of woes. We cannot understand it without going back in thought to the horrible end of the depraved Jezebel. Behold the impetuous Jehu dashing up to the gate of

Jezreel, and, in response to Jezebel's brazen challenge, crying, "Throw her down!" Without a thought of remorse, she is flung from the battlements. Her blood bespatters doors and windows. His horses' hoofs and chariot-wheels crush her mangled body. Flesh and brains and blood are scattered on every side. Hungry dogs leave but bare skull and bones. Such is the unvarnished story; and the very thought of it is calculated to fill the mind with horror.

These were the dreadful scenes connected with the divine judgments on the depraved Jezebel of Jewish history; and this whole message leads up to the conviction that there were similar horrors endured by the wretched people of Thyatira of which she was the appropriate type. What it was in detail we are not informed; but the unerring word of prophecy assures us that it must have been fearful. A single intimation expresses its terrors: "I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts." What depths of horrors are here implied! "All the churches"—then and there existing, and all the world over, and all the ages through —"shall know," shall recognize its terrible meaning—it would be so public, so astounding, so awful.

This description of the shocking curse upon the finally unrepenting is most significant. An eminent dignitary of the Church of England has thus described it: "Look *outward*, and behold a curse in the creature, vanity, emptiness, vexation, disappointments; every creature armed with a sting, to revenge its Maker's quarrel. Look *inward*, and behold a curse in the conscience, accusing, witnessing, condemning, haling to the tribunal of vengence; first defiling with the allowance, and after terrifying with the remembrance of it. Look *upward*, and behold a curse in the heavens; the wrath of God revealed from thence upon all unrighteousness. Look *downward*, and behold a curse in the earth; death ready to put a period to all the pleasures of sin, and like a trap-door to let down into hell, where nothing of sin will remain but the worm and the fire. Look into the *Scriptures*, and see the curse there described—an everlasting banishment from the glory of God's presence; an everlasting punishment by the glory of his power."

This threatened punishment of the guilt, first of Jezebel, and then of the transgressors in Thyatira, is made prominent here that it might serve as a conspicuous element of the great Beacon that was either to attract or warn in all after-time. Shocking as it is, it must nevertheless be carefully considered by every one

who would be faithful to his God, his Church, or his own soul. The fate of both Jezebel and Thyatira is recorded for the admonition of the Church. So most certainly will it be with all the persisting and finally unrepenting—their punishment will be thus certain, thus public, and thus awful in its character.

### 10. SEDUCTIONS.

The seductive influence of sin, as seen first in the wretched life of Jezebel, and then in the apostates of this church of Thyatira, is so real and so terrible that it receives special consideration in this message from the heavenly throne. Connected with it is the notice of the contagious effect of evil, which is also made conspicuous and brought out with alarming vividness. Sin never terminates in itself, but has a propagating power which makes it much to be dreaded because of the unknown depths of evil to which it may lead.

This peculiarity of sin's influence is so deplorable that the enthroned King saw fit to send down this warning against it. The contagious nature of sin is one of the things which makes it the most to be dreaded. Invariably does it propagate itself through its depraving consequences. Not only is it evil in itself, but its very nature is to extend and deprave all that it touches.

Special warning against this danger seems to have been intended in connection with the corruptions in the church of Thyatira. The enemies of the truth there seem to have lurked in the dark, and to have sown the seed of evil, not exciting the fears of their victims, but corrupting their understanding, until, before they were aware, their ruin was made sure. The minds of youth and others were poisoned before danger was apprehended. So it was then, so it is now, and so it is everywhere—that *the wicked suffer not alone.*

So was it in the days of Jezebel; her depraving influence and that of her minions, the priests of Baal, had corrupted the nation before it was aware of its fall. She had made promises to the people through the ritual of the heathen Sidonians—most terribly were those promises fulfilled when, because of the divine judgments upon their wickedness, the authorities of Jezebel "took the king's sons, and slew seventy persons, and put their heads in baskets, and sent them" to the city; and when the impetuous Jehu "slew all that remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, and all his great men, and his kinsfolks, and his priests, until he left him none remaining." Here, notwithstanding the de-

lusive promises of the false prophetess, Jezebel, every line of the sad history of seduction and idolatry was as if written in letters of blood.

The old type was also fulfilled in the apostasy and ruin in the church of Thyatira. Not only were the seducers themselves, but also those whom they had treacherously led into a denial of the true God—the whole apostate brood, the whole progeny of seducers—swept away by the awful visitations from heaven. As the divine wrath upon Jezebel first, then upon those of whom she was the type, so the judgments of God upon the kindred sins of lewdness and idolatry are threatened in language which makes them a standing admonition to the whole world, and that of every age. These are its appalling words: "They shall judge them after the manner of adulteresses, and after the manner of women that shed blood; because they are adulteresses, and blood is in their hands. For thus saith the Lord God, I will bring up a company upon them, and will give them to be removed and spoiled. And the company will stone them with stones, and dispatch them with their swords; and they shall slay their sons and daughters, and burn up their houses with fire. Thus will I cause lewdness to cease out of the land, that all women may be taught not to do after your lewdness. And they shall recompense your lewdness upon you, and ye shall bear the sin of your idols; and ye shall know that I am the Lord God." In all these words is seen the mind of the Lord of infinite purity concerning whatever is unclean and idolatrous, and the certain and fearful penalties which must follow.

### 11. ALL SECRETS KNOWN TO GOD.

It is not without deep significance that the Son of God is here represented as having "his eyes like unto a flame of fire." All the evil depicted in this church is associated with pretense, deception, and secret arts. "Calleth herself a prophetess," "teaching and seducing my servants"—this is the language used to describe the peculiar temptations to which this people were subjected. False teaching was the deep, deadly method adopted to destroy their faith, and blast all that was good in their piety of which God approved. That piety seems to have been so decided that no open attack upon it was attempted. The onset must be in an insidious and disguised manner. False doctrines must be inculcated, delusive hopes must be held out, lying promises must be made. A self-conceited air was assumed, as it is by so many

egotistical scientists of the present day, as if the deceivers had a profounder knowledge and a more recondite wisdom than those of ordinary men.

Such seems to have been the course of the pretentious Jezebelites of Thyatira; but the Son of God, with his eyes like flaming fire, was not to be deceived. That penetrating eye saw all their fabrications. They tried to lurk about, hiding with their nefarious doctrines, and propagating, their destructive principles; but He saw them, and discerned their wicked designs. There was no escaping from his scrutiny. As clearly as the noonday sun his eye penetrated all their infamous schemes. No vails or screens could be so interposed as to prevent him from seeing down into their reins and hearts, into their impious designs and their assumed profundity of wisdom. Most clearly could he discern the very depths of their passions and purposes—the very depths of their inmost souls. Very plainly did he discern the evil sources from which their doctrines sprang, and the destructive results to which they tended.

Most significant is it that the Lord of the churches is described here as possessed of this perfect knowledge of all they do, or say, or purpose. It is a solemn warning, not only to these false teachers of Thyatira, but also to every church, to every people, to every soul. Not only is the outward act, but also the secret contrivance and the very intentions of the soul, lying plainly before him. Is there a corrupt desire, an unfriendly feeling, a wish that would be covered up from the world, or a wicked scheme revolving in the heart against him, or his people—he knows it, carefully observes it, and has his own plans, infinitely deeper, and absolutely perfect, by which it shall be counteracted. His knowledge is perfect, and his purposes infallible.

### 12. REWARD ACCORDING TO WORK.

By his all-seeing eye, God penetrated the secret of their works, and purposes, and thoughts; and his solemn warning to the church was that he would deal with them according to what they actually were. Instead of making to them engagements which never were intended to be fulfilled, he would inevitably punish the evil and reward the faithful. His promise that could not possibly fail was: "I will give unto every one of you according to your works." The faithful, the loyal, and the obedient, he would reward in spite of the whole Balaam, Nicolaitan, and Jezebel crew—and that just in proportion as they proved true to his

righteous cause. In contrast with the delusive engagements of the seductive teachers, he would give absolutely just and righteous recompense. With all, righteous and unrighteous, he would deal precisely according to their works.

This gracious engagement of our heavenly Master with his faithful servants has been kept too much in the background. The fear of going to the opposite extreme—of taking to ourselves the merit of our salvation, or of regarding it as a reward for our fidelity, has kept us from giving that prominent place which the Scriptures do to the fact that God himself speaks of the blessings he gives as a *reward*. The words of Dr. Craven present this matter in its proper light: "'According to your works.' This promise or threat"—for it is both—"is one which we commonly keep at this time too much in the background; but it is one which we should press on ourselves and others with the same emphasis wherewith Christ and his Word press it upon us all. It is, indeed, one of the gravest mischiefs which Rome has bequeathed to us, that in a reaction and protest, itself absolutely necessary, against the false emphasis which she puts on works, unduly trusting therein to share with Christ's merits in our justification, we often fear to place upon them the true stress; being, as they are, to speak with St. Bernard, the '*via regia*,' however little the '*causa regnandi*;' though here, too, it must of course never be forgotten that it is only the good tree which brings forth good fruit, and that no tree is good until Christ has made it so."

In Scripture there is no such hesitancy in speaking of the blessings which God bestows upon his people as a gracious reward. Look at the sublime scenes of the Judgment as they are depicted by the loving lips of our Lord in the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew. There the whole blessed sentence on the righteous is founded on what they did; while the awful doom of the wicked follows the charge of what they did not. How plainly is this solemn fact asserted in Matthew: "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father, with his angels, and then shall he reward every man according to his works!" How emphatic it is made in Romans: "Who will render to every man according to his works!" How plain it is made in the words of the inspired Preacher: "Doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? and he that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it? and shall not he render to every man according to his work?" As a truth clearly revealed it is spoken of by the sacred psalmist: "Also

unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy; for thou renderest to every man according to his work." The whole wondrous truth is that God, out of his unbounded goodness, has seen fit, for the sake of what Christ has done, to grant the faithful these blessings as a reward.

On the contrary, the wicked also shall receive the recompense of their crimes in the sight of God. Thus, in all, whether in punishing the guilty, in seeing through the secret machinations of the enemies, or in rewarding the righteous, the divine glory shall be made conspicuous. The glory of his goodness will be seen in rewarding the righteous; and the glory of his justice in punishing the wicked. And this he would make manifest in his dealings with that people. So it was divinely intended, and so it would be certainly accomplished. The purpose of God was clearly expressed: "All the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts." All the seven churches, all the churches of that land, all the churches of that age, and all the churches of every age, would clearly see that, no matter what the contrivances of depraved men, even they, and all else, should manifest the supreme glory of the everlasting Jehovah.

### 13. PROMISE TO THAT PARTICULAR CHURCH.

We must constantly bear in mind the fact that, in each of the messages there are two promises—one to that particular church, and the other applicable primarily to that church, but also to all churches and to all individual members. We find this peculiarity in this message to the believers of Thyatira. Its special form is: "But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; *I will put upon you none other burden.*"

What, in scriptural language, is meant by the expression, *burden?* This is not very difficult to answer, as its application in other places makes it abundantly evident. We find that it has two significations, and which one of the two is to be adopted in any place must be determined by the connection. One of its meanings is that of a threatened judgment or punishment. This is undoubtedly what is signified in the passage, "Remember how that when I and thou rode together after Ahab his father, the Lord laid this *burden* upon him, 'Surely I have seen yesterday the blood of Naboth, and the blood of his sons, saith the Lord; and I will requite thee in this plat, saith the Lord." Its other meaning is that of obligation, or law, or duty. In this

sense it must be taken in that most blessed promise of our Lord: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy and my *burden* is light." Yoke, or burden, here, denotes the sum of the duties which we owe to our heavenly Lord. The same was evidently its import in the deliverance of the Synod of Jerusalem: "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us, to lay upon you no greater *burden* than these necessary things: that ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication." Here it indicated the sum of the obligations laid upon the Church by that inspired body.

There can be no doubt that such is its signification in the passage before us. When our Lord declared that he would lay no other burden upon the faithful of that city, his meaning clearly was that he would require no other duties or sacrifices from them than those which they were already discharging. But why is the special promise to that particular church put in this form?

Its special form was doubtless determined by the falsehoods and errors that were springing up in the church. According to the lies which were industriously circulated, the teachings of Paul, and those who were like-minded with him, were that the moral law was utterly abrogated, and had no reference to those who were the true followers of Jesus. Believers were "not under the law, but under grace," and hence might with impunity disregard all moral obligation. This antinomian spirit was the bitter root whence sprang all the heresies of that day. This was such a widespread and grave corruption that it demands special consideration. The weighty words concerning it by Dean Trench are worthy of very careful thought: "It was the masterstroke of the antinomian teachers to exaggerate, to distort, to misapply all that Paul had spoken about the freedom of the Christian man from the law. They were the ultra-Paulines, who caricatured his doctrine, till of God's truth they had made a devil's lie. Paul had said of the law that it was *not the ground of the Christian man's justification*, nor yet the source of his holiness; they made him to say that it *was not the rule of his life;* as though he had rejected it altogether as a burden no longer to be borne by the redeemed. The Lord takes up this word *burden:* "I *do* lay on you a burden, but it is a burden which it is your

blessedness to bear, and over and above which I will impose no other."

How is this ruinous error of the antinomians met in the message from the throne of God? Not by disclaiming any moral obligation—as if that were one of the blood-bought privileges of the true children of God; but by assuming such moral obligation; and then defining what it is. "I *do* lay on you, who are my true followers, a burden, but not a burden that it is irksome to bear. I lay on you no other or heavier burden than that which you are already bearing—namely, that ye abstain from fornication, and from all eating of meat which had been before offered in sacrifice to idols. I have no other or heavier burden to lay on you than this."

By giving his charge to that people in this special form, the consideration and goodness of the great Head of the church was clearly manifested. It maintains the truth; overloads believers with no onerous burdens; and makes a real and precious privilege of what had otherwise been a repulsive duty. It requires no pretense at sanctity, while it abates no moral obligation. The consideration of our gracious Lord is seen in *drawing* instead of *driving* his faithful followers. We cannot but recognize in it the same gracious disposition that was so wonderfully manifested in that blessed invitation: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. *For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*" It is truly wonderful how our loving Lord in this way strongly enforced a moral obligation, and, at the same time, presented it as one of the most attractive promises; and thus the disposition he manifests becomes a significant principle of the Church life which should forever afterward prevail.

### 14. ADMONITION.

The Lord of the churches here gives to this people, as to the other churches, that advice which is most appropriate for them in their peculiar difficulties and temptations. The whole case lay distinctly before him, and, out of his infinite wisdom, he gives the counsel which is the wisest and best. With only one thing does he charge them; but that one embraces a principle, of the highest moment, that never changes. It was the same principle which was announced to the whole Church at an earlier day. It was first charged home upon the mother church at Jeru-

salem; and was expressed in these words: "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these *necessary things:* that ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from fornication; from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well." In the passage before us its exceedingly simple form is: "I will put upon you none other burden. *But that which ye have already, hold fast till I come.*" No new obligation, or contrivances, or novelties, or untried projects, would he ask, but faithful adherence to the doctrines and duties with which they were already familiar. This was all that was required of them. Not novelties, or modern inventions, did he demand; but the old duties issued amid the thunder tones of Sinai, or sung in the sweetest strains of Zion's sacred harp.

The gracious counsel given them was that they should not allow themselves to be robbed of the precious truths which they already possessed through the allurements of novelties and untried experiments. Their tender and considerate Lord would lay on them no other burden of duties or doctrines; but simply require of them to hold on firmly to what was already familiar to them. The fatherly counsel to them was: Keep steadfastly by my works of love until the end; and then a reward most blessed would be granted. The mandate, divine, tender, and considerate, was: "That which ye have already, hold fast till I come"—Hold on to the works which I command, and to the doctrines which I have imparted; already hast thou been instructed as to all that I require. To this the message from the throne charges the faithful of Thyatira to cling with the utmost tenacity. With a grasp which nothing could possibly sever, or even relax, were they ever to adhere. The works required are the fruits of the Spirit, and, from their very nature, they must be sweet, and holy, and safe. The mandate from Jehovah is, "Let no delusive promise lead you astray." Persevere in the good old way. Hold on until the end.

Our attention should be specially awakened to this point because of the prominent place which is given it in this message that was intended for all the churches. The Holy Spirit admonishes us of the surpassing importance of clinging to the old, the tried, the Heaven-ordained; and so, of the tremendous risk of tampering with novelties, and risking the truth and our souls with it. There is great danger here. Seeking after improvements, while we have God's plain and sure commands is hazard-

ing all. Many a time has the Church been thereby brought to the brink of ruin. Many a destructive enemy has in this way found admittance who otherwise, seen in his monstrous form, would have been shunned in righteous indignation.

### 15. DEPTHS OF SATAN.

The admonition against this danger of being carried away by novelties is put in a very peculiar form. "But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known *the depths of Satan, as they speak.*" "*The depths of Satan!*" what means this? what peculiar aspect of the temptation does it present? Why are such words used? what special impress are they designed to make?

It should be noticed that the influence of the devil upon these first representative churches is referred to in three of them successively, and that in a gradation which seems to be more and more impressive. In Smyrna the reference is to the "synagogue of Satan," in Pergamos to the "seat," or throne, "of Satan," and here it is to "the depths of Satan." In each of them his malign influence was felt; but in each of them in a different degree. The evil influences described leave scarce a doubt that a climax was designed, as well as what that climax is. In commercial Smyrna there were multitudes of Jews, and those Jews were the fierce opponents of the gospel; hence, as the synagogue was almost exclusively Jewish, it was then "the synagogue of Satan." In Pergamos the opposition was bitter, bloody, and conducted by the authorities of the city; hence it was termed the seat, the throne, the very metropolis of Satan. Here in Thyatira it was still worse—worst of all. Here the seductive influences were most dangerous. Opposition to the truth was gilded over by all that was most attractive, it bore the name of worship and was organized into a system of religion, and was therefore termed "the depths of Satan"—the depths of his cunning and deceit, and malignant persecutions.

Assuming this as the purpose of this peculiar arrangement of the expressions, the remaining question concerns the meaning of these words to the church of Thyatira. "Unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak." The two clauses, "as many as have not this doctrine," and "which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak," do not imply two classes, but the amplification of the description

of the first class. "As many as have not this doctrine"—that is, this system of heresies. This is the first description, then comes the further account of the same class: "have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak."

Now, as to the significance of the expression, "depths of Satan," there cannot be much difficulty; clearly it implies the depths of his plots, of his malignant schemes and of his cunning contrivances against the kingdom of Christ. The real difficulty, however, pertains to the meaning of the words, "as they speak." This is an essential and manifestly important element of the description. That description is not simply "the depths of Satan," but "the depths of Satan *as they speak*." What peculiar fact, or thought, or custom is introduced by this?—for clearly there is some special significance in the language.

It might refer to some proverbial saying which was in common use, and so be equivalent to our ordinary expression, "as they say." That, however, would scarce come up to the gravity of words as prompted by the Holy Ghost. As many writers explain, it might intend sarcasm in the use of the word *depths*—these heretics claimed that they were skilled in the depths of things; but the Spirit, in irony, throws in—depths *of Satan*. Again, however, irony from the lips of our Lord grates upon our ears. Besides, "depths of Satan, as they speak," is all one description of the profession which was made by themselves.

Hence we are thrown upon what we cannot help believing is the true import of the expression—namely, that this corrupt body of heretics was so puffed up by self-conceit that they claimed to have explored the very depths of Satan's schemes, and to be so familiar with them that they were able to outwit even the devil himself. They professed that they were skilled in the most cunning arts of the Wicked One. They were well acquainted with the drift of his darkest contrivances, and were therefore able to defeat his most malignant projects. Their loud-sounding pretensions were that they were more than a match for his most artful plots. This was their claim—the claim which was implied in this peculiar expression, "as they speak."

The sad result of this self-conceit was the infamous claim which they soon came to make—that they had attained such profound wisdom that they could indulge all the lusts of the flesh, and yet keep the soul uncontaminated. So profound were they that they could even outwit the devil by yielding to his temptations to fleshly indulgences, and so letting him appear to conquer, while,

at the same time, they preserved their hearts pure, and above the evil. This was their high-flying pretension. This gave great emphasis to the seemingly insignificant expression, "as they speak." On this account they came to arrogate to themselves the high-sounding title, the *Gnostics*—the knowning ones.

In the sight of God, however, as well as at the tribunal of common sense, the claim was as absurd as it was abominable. Obviously, it took away all the restraints of conscience, and opened the gate to the free indulgence of the most debasing lusts. This was the abomination which gave the church of Thyatira its bad pre-eminence above the other six.

Such was the deplorable state into which many in that church, so highly favored and honored, had fallen. Remember that these heretics, with all their infatuation and gross depravity, were professed Christians, that their ears had listened to an apostolic man, that they were associated in church fellowship with faithful men and women who were periling their lives for the name of Jesus. Even they fell so low. Most significant was that fall, when the elements of its descent are considered. The dark catalogue contained pride, self-conceit, self-reliance, perverting the truth, tampering with sin, corruption, debasing lewdness. The substance was that ever-appearing antinomianism whose myriad forms mar the brightest pages of the Church's history. Its one monstrous appearance here was in the sanctimonious pretense of seeking for the knowledge of the mysteries of evil by personal experiment and observation. It was the fearfully dangerous curiosity of Adam when he would try for himself the meaning of good and evil, and of the prurient hardihood that would go down into the den of infamy to discover how deep and dark it is.

God himself has stamped its brand upon this transcendent folly by giving it such a conspicuous place in this Beacon of the Ages. Words of warning more emphatic and solemn could not be uttered than those which he has caused to be sounded down through the centuries of time, and over the regions of mankind. Its signals of danger are never to be withdrawn. And how much they are needed may be seen even at the present time, when instances are not wanting of the corruption of perverted love to God leading into the very abominations of lust, and of the arrogance of assumed superior knowledge leading to the boasting of a wisdom above even that of the inspired Word. The light of that warning in the Beacon tells us of the danger. Who of us is safe? Wherever there is a self-righteousness that makes its

victim boast of a supposed superiority to others—the first downward step has been taken towards a gulf the awful abyss of which is exposed in the downfall of these apostates of Thyatira.

### 16. THE OVERCOMING.

As in all the other messages to the churches, there is here, in that to Thyatira, an "overcometh" on which an important part of the heavenly communication is suspended. What that overcoming imports is determined by the peculiar circumstances arising both from the enemies within and the dangers impending without. The contest with pagan seductions was that in which they were summoned to engage, and in which they might have the blessedness of proving victorious. In this contest they were tempted to join in the revelry of pagan feasts, to enjoy the attractions of heathen worship, and to partake with friends and neighbors in the alluring scenes of the temples—above all, and pervading all, to indulge in such lewdness as cannot be even named.

All this formed a conflict for their professed Christian character, to overcome in which required a degree of self-denial that would be exceedingly great, but the promised reward of which would be infinitely greater. Nor was the conflict with their formidable foes to last for an hour, or a day, merely, but to the very end of life. It was to be a lifelong struggle, and that with all their strength of body, mind, and soul. It was to be a conflict that would end only with their earthly existence, so that they were most earnestly called upon to persevere—to persevere to the end. This perseverance was made most emphatic. "There is a last enemy to be destroyed—death. We must hold out to the conquest of this last adversary, which, if it conquer us by the sting of our sin, shall send us to the doors of hell; if we conquer it by our faith, it shall send us to the gates of the blessed city—heaven. All the voyage through the perilous sea of this world is lost if we suffer shipwreck in the haven, and lose our reward there where we should have received it. What get we, if we keep Satan short of ruling us with his force many hours, when at our last hour he shall snatch our bliss from us? The runner speeds all the way; but he comes at the race's end to the goal, he stretches forth his hand to catch the prize. Be sure of the last step, to put forth the hand of faith then most strongly; lest the reward be lost which thou, with much labor, hast aimed at."

The Lord of the church promises nothing to his people with-

out, at the same time, telling them frankly the trials and sufferings through which the promises must be reached. He warns them that great dangers are to be encountered in all their pathway to glory. That heaven, with all its unspeakable bliss, is to be arrived at only through great tribulation, was a solemn truth then, as it is now, and will be evermore. The same diabolic spirit that had introduced the heresies which were prevailing in that church would still exist, and point deadly shafts at the faithful followers of Christ. The time has never yet come when the true people of God did not have to "wrestle, not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." So it has been from the day when Abel fell beneath the murderous hand of his brother until this day when even professed science is perverted into the most violent efforts to uproot all the foundations of our faith. From the very nature of the case, it must ever require an intense struggle to keep the soul alive amid this region of spiritual death—this valley of dry bones. It cannot be expected that this cold-hearted world will be friendly to those whose life is a constant rebuke to its depravity. Moreover, from what we know of the nature of that gracious God with whom we have to do, we are assured that this desperate opposition to his people and cause would not be suffered, did he not design in some way to bring great blessings out of it. Even now we can understand how the faithful in Thyatira would, by it, be rendered stronger, purer, better. Then, too, we can easily see how it would furnish an occasion wherein God's strength and goodness would be manifested, and by which believers would be disciplined and made better, and by which the bliss of the future world would be rendered more rapturous. In these ways and in others which it is not difficult for us to understand, it remains gloriously true that God ever has, and ever will, make "the wrath of man to praise him."

### 17. POWER OVER THE NATIONS.

We are next to consider the great general promises which are here made to this church, and, through it, to all other churches and to all other believers who may be tried in a similar manner. The gracious Lord of the kingdom would comfort all his tried and suffering people by unveiling to them the triumphant issue of the contest through which they may have to pass for his sake. He flashes a few rays of divine light over the lowering future,

in order that they may the more courageously strive, and suffer, and persevere. He lets them see that, though they may have to contend against mighty foes and infernal plots, yet they will surely conquer, gloriously conquer. Though they may now have to encounter wicked devices, and meet disappointments, and suffer sorely, yet they may be certain that before them and their cause there lies a bright, triumphant future.

So would it be in that eternal future to which both friends and enemies were hastening; but, even in the coming ages of time, the kingdom and people of God would obtain the mastery over all the nations that might oppose them. As with an iron bar smashing a frail vessel of clay, they would break in pieces all the powers of earth that might, at any time, be arrayed against them. All evil combinations that might be contrived for the injury of the cause of Christ would be crushed into shivers. In their total destruction it would be seen how contemptible were all plots formed against the Son of God.

Moreover, in this overthrow of all the evil powers of earth, the followers of Jesus would be elevated to a share in his divine royalty. They would be associated with him in his kingly power over the conquered nations. The contest of time would end by their being permitted to share the throne with the triumphant Prince of Peace. In that final victory, all uncertainty would be taken away, and the righteous would be crowned with absolute dominion over all the realms of earth, and all the thrones of mankind. All the nations would lie at their feet, compelled to bow down to the sceptre of Jesus. His royalty would be shared by all those faithful saints who had been, with him, tried and had suffered unto death. The contest might be a long and painful one, but it would have a triumphant end. To Christ and his people had been pledged the dominion over the nations of earth, and that kingly glory was sure to come after.

### 18. THE MORNING STAR.

This is one of the promises of the messages which is marvellously rich and comprehensive. At our very first glance we discern in it a heavenly light breaking upon a long, dark night, and the beginning of a bright day of beauty and gladness coming after ages of deformity and of gloom—a morning to the world of joy and gladness. So affluent is the promise in the richest significance that it is no wonder many different interpretations as to its meaning have been attempted.

To some interpreters the promise of the Morning Star is a divine engagement that a clear light would soon appear and scatter the darkness and the doubt and the gloom which lowered over the afflicted church of Thyatira. It is that; but it is far more. To some it is the true light from God, for which generations had been praying and watching, and which was soon to beam out over the whole world of mankind. It is that, but much more. To some it is the dawn of the bright gospel day which the whole volume of revelation foretold as awaiting the Church of God, and which the faithful of Thyatira would be among the first to behold. It is that, but more. To some it is a bright manifestation from heaven which would be safe and joyous as contrasted with "the depths of Satan." It is that, but it is also far more. To some, it is the light and glory of God as infinitely surpassing the brilliancy which pagan superstition pretended to be the glory of their sun-god, Apollo. It is that, but more. To some it is a priceless ornament, adorned with brilliant gems which no human skill can surpass. It is that, even a star in the diadem of Immanuel, but far more also. To some it is the dawn of a blessed morning that would follow the long, dark night of sin and woe which had long cursed the world. It is that, but even more still.

It was all these—it was a clear light after awful darkness, the true light from God, the glorious gospel day, the knowledge that could expose the depths of Satan, the brilliancy beside which even the pretended beams of Apollo would be darkness; the truth, the truth of God shining out in glory after the long ages of darkness and despair. It would be a star, bright and new, gleaming out after the long, long night of earth's woe; a star that would not appear as a mere moment of heavenly radiance, but would be followed by an enduring brightness; a star, joyous and happy, and full of promise; a star that would be peerless even in the glorious heavenly firmament; a star that, having been long looked for, would soon appear and fill with ecstasy the hearts of all the true followers of Him who was the embodiment of truth and righteousness.

In order to have a proper conception of this blessed promise we must depict to ourselves the surroundings of the believers of Thyatira to whom it was first addressed. Only then shall we understand its peculiar allusions and import. The church of Thyatira was located in that city which had Apollo, the personification of the sun, as its tutelary deity; around it were the hereti-

cal sects which claimed to be pre-eminently wise, the knowing ones—the gnostics—to whom the profoundest depths of wisdom lay open, and who were themselves so learned that they could outwit even Satan, the arch-deceiver. Against such assumptions as these, the true followers of Christ in that city had to be every day contending. They were assailed by superstitions which masked the boldest pretensions—pretensions all having the same bias, namely, that of superior knowledge. They dwelt among those who were opposed to God and truth. In order to adhere to the teachings of the divine Spirit as contained in the Scriptures, they had to encounter persecution in every formidable aspect. To persons thus surrounded, what could be more encouraging than this assured promise of the Morning Star—light in darkness, light from God shining in the heavenly horizon; light which, though but dim at first, would become more and more bright until it would be absorbed in the perfect day—all which was involved in this most appropriate emblem—*the Morning Star.*

With this understanding of the difficulties and dangers by which the Thyatira believers were environed, we may easily see the appropriateness and the cheer in this promise made to them of the Morning Star. Looking at it in this light, when we attempt to analyze it we can easily comprehend the amazing kindness of the Lord of the church, in so providing for the strengthening of his people. It is not difficult for us then to appreciate the various elements of hope and comfort the promise contains.

At the first glance it may be seen that, in the promise of the Morning Star we have another view of the old symbol which had cheered the fathers on the border of the promised land: "I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel." The promise tells of the celestial light which had startled the wise men of the East, and sent them on their journey to find the Star of Bethlehem. By an emblem that is peculiarly expressive it gives assurance that the church, after a long, dark, and troubled night, will behold the breaking out of a longed-for light —light in the midst of mystery, and superstition, and lies; light that will infinitely transcend the idolatrous conception of the mythic sun-god whose capital was that same Thyatira. It will be the Star of the Morning, a brilliancy not seen for a moment merely, but will beam out brighter and brighter until merged in the perfect day. This emblem embodied the whole spirit

of the morning. Living in the very atmosphere of the pagan Apollo, the deity of light, and beside whom the Son of God is seen as having eyes like unto a flame of fire, and with feet like fine brass—to such a people how significant was the brightest orb of the whole starry world! What could be more expressive to a people who had struggled loyally for the truth through a long, suffering night than the prospect of the first, fresh, bright, health-giving dawn of the morning!

Every view we take of the emblem makes it the more significant. The Morning Star! Does not its pre-eminence among the stars tell of the pre-eminence of the church in glory? Does it not tell plainly that in the world of bliss it should differ from the other stars in glory? Does it not tell of an eminent place awaiting it in the heavenly immortality? It gives assurance "of an eminent position in the firmament of history, in the heaven of immortality, united to a glorious appearance." And in view of it, well might that old church have said: "We have also a more sure word of prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts." To them that great promise was the dawn of a new time, the last time until the coming of Christ, the morning radiance of eternity. Well could they look forward to the bursting out of that Star upon their transported vision, as the point from which the rule of the saints would commence. Their tempters professed that they had knowledge of the depths of Satan; but here was assurance of the knowledge of the heights of glory. All these elements of light, truth, and comfort were comprehended in the one promise of the Morning Star. It was all this; but far more also.

We emphasize that this promise must be studied with reference to the circumstances of the church, and especially with reference to the false teachers in Thyatira. They professed that they were able to look down into the depths of the plots of Satan; here is the divine engagement that saints would behold the heights of heavenly glory. Higher still does the promise ascend. Christ engages to give himself to his faithful followers: for his memorable words were: "I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches; I am the root and offspring of David, and the bright and morning star." Yea, higher still does the glory rise; for he engages to make the faithful sharers in his morning glory: "The righteous shall shine forth as the

sun in the kingdom of their Father;" "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness, as the stars for ever and ever."

It would seem as if every element of hope, of light, and of glory were embraced in this wondrously comprehensive emblem. It would appear as if it contained all that could be promised. Here all the currents of prophecy seem united in one great stream of glory. It is as if all the predicted comings of Christ had met in this one bright hope; and all were given to this representative church of Thyatira, as peculiarly hers, in recompense for her faithful resistance to Jezebel's seductions. All is grandly prophetic of Christ's coming to illumine and cheer his friends as well as judge his enemies. This engagement is made in a manner that is peculiar, and that must make an impress deep and lasting. It is made under the emblem of a star—a brilliant star, a star like many other stars, but brighter than the rest; a star clear and new, coming fresh after a dark night; a star that would not be a mere flash, but be followed by the constantly-increasing light of day; a star that would be joyous and full of promise; a star that would beam in the heavenly firmament; a star that having been long looked for, would soon appear and make glad the heart of every beholder. All these were doubtless included in this emblem as used concerning the church of Thyatira; but an application still more grand and comprehensive is to be considered, as our study of the whole subject shall approach its close.

Quite impressive is the title Morning Star as found here in the message to the church of Thyatira; but very much more so as it occurs in the closing chapter of the Bible. Not only is it in that last chapter, but it is virtually at the end of the Word of God. When we examine the last words we find that the 16th verse is substantially the close of the Sacred Book. That verse ends: *I am "the bright and morning star"*—after that only the conclusion.

Is not that fact deeply significant? What is the meaning of it? Why is the expression, "I am the morning star," the last heard from Jesus, as he closes the Book? Why is it made the last word? If the *morning star* be the symbol of what is fresh, novel, animated, promising, is not this closing expression the final pledge of our dear Lord that such would he be to the joy of the people of God for ever and ever? It declares that to the saints in Christ there never would be weariness, satiety, or cloy for ever. The Bible would be always fresh and new; there would ordinarily be novelty in Christian experience.

We cannot help looking with amazement as the great Book of Time is closed before us and we are suffered to catch one rapturous glance on the pages of the sublime Book of Eternity. Its description stands out in the single expression: "I am the bright and morning star." That is all there is, or could be, revealed to us as yet; for, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." "Oh, for more!" we cry. But even this hints of the infinite depths which we may explore to all eternity. One glimpse of the glory to be revealed entrances the soul; but will not the saint become satiated by the perpetual fruition of the same rapture? Will not the indescribable bliss at length lose its zest? Will not the ecstatic rapture wear into satiety, as the endless ages pass on? Oh, no!—the one marvelous promise from the lips of our glorious Lord, as he went up to the bosom of the Father, was: "*I am the bright and morning star!*" Not *I will be;* but *I am* the Morning Star. *I am*, to the ransomed, as they enter upon their eternal bliss; *I am*, as cycle after cycle opens up before them; *I am*, at every influx of new bliss; *I am*, for ever and ever—experience always fresh, always novel, always upward; always the rapture of holy curiosity; always newness,—for as the Son of God I am always with them.

# SARDIS.

## THE GOLDEN SANDS.

## THE MESSAGE.

And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write: These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.

Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God.

Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.

Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.

He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

# CHAPTER XII.

## THE GOLDEN SANDS.

### 1. PECULIARITIES OF CITY AND CHURCH.

ALTHOUGH it is undoubtedly true that the seven messages are all constructed on the same plan, yet it cannot be overlooked that there are, in each of them, special features, arising from the peculiarities of city and church, which give it a character of its own. Moreover, there are in the messages certain things which are common to them all, and certain others which are peculiar to each.

One peculiarity of this message, distinguishing it from all the rest, is that in it there is no mention made of opponents to the truth, or persecutors of the faithful followers of the Lord. There are no enemies spoken of as there are, with so much emphasis, in the other messages. Sad is the catalogue of the persecutions through which the others were called to pass, but in the communication to the believers of Sardis there is no such painful allusion.

Was this because with them there were no such attacks made upon the kingdom of darkness as to call forth the opposition of the enemy? Easy, affluent, conformed to the world, there was no such positive effort for the truth in Christ Jesus as to arouse the hostility of the powers of darkness. On the other hand, can there be a question that one great cause of the indifference in the church of Sardis, which called forth the charge against it, "Thou hast a name that those livest and art dead," was that their Christian fidelity had not been braced up by the endurance of persecution? All the annals of persecution go to confirm the truth that the most deadly rage of persecution only serves to render the faithful more loyal, courageous, and strong.

Another peculiarity of this message is found in the evidence which it furnishes that wealth and worldly prosperity are not friendly to grace, either in the individual soul or in the Church as a body. It is a fact which we may not overlook that the wealthy Sardis and the elegant Laodicea were the two churches which had sunken into the lowest spiritual state; and that the humble Philadelphia and Smyrna were the two which were spoken of as the richest towards God. It is also a most ominous

fact that, except Ephesus, for which there was a local physical cause, the spiritually dead and wretched Sardis and the lukewarm Laodicea are the only cities of the messages which are, at this day, in a state of absolute ruin and desolation.

### 2. LOCATION.

What Jerusalem was to Judea, what Babylon was to Chaldea, what Rome was to Italy, what Paris is to France, what London is to England, that was Sardis to the kingdom of Lydia. Its present condition can give but very little intimation of what it once was, or why it should have been so great. The wilderness of scattered ruins called Sardo, or Sart, on the plain of Natolia, will be interrogated in vain as to its old influence in helping forward the currents of civilization. The place is wretched now, and yet that plain is one of imperishable renown in the world's history. On it was concentrated the wealth of Crœsus. It witnessed the marching of the victorious army of Alexander the Great, the triumphs of Cyrus, the departure of the "Ten Thousand," with Xenophon at their head, and the mustering of the ill-fated forces of Xerxes. It was the centre of the civilization, culture, wealth, and empire of the age of its greatest glory.

It was situated at a confluence of the great highways which led up from the Ægean coast into the interior highlands, the valley of the Euphrates, and the regions of the far East. From this it will be seen how important as a commercial point it must have been, since over those great roads was carried the merchandise of the seas, and in return was transported the rich produce of the mines, forests, fields, and valleys of the interior. The exact place the city occupied may be understood by the statements that it lay three days east from Ephesus, nearly fifty miles due east from Smyrna, thirty miles south of Thyatira, and twenty-four miles nearly due west of Philadelphia.

Its situation was one of surpassing beauty. It had nearly every natural advantage. It was on the left bank, and about two miles from the river Hermus, a stream flowing down from the mountain region of the interior and emptying into the Gulf of Smyrna on the coast of the Ægean. An exceedingly beautiful plain extended from the left bank, or south side of the river, for the two miles to the foot of the Tmolus mountain. At the point where it meets that mountain, and where a steep and high spur juts out, there is a little brook called the Pactolus that pours

down from the heights, meanders through the plain, and enters the river. At that point of junction of mountain and plain, and brook and fields connecting mountain-foot and great river, was located the splendid city. Every element of the location conspired to increase the beauty and convenience of the situation for a great and prosperous capital.

Mountain peak towering up into a sublime acropolis; grand slope from the southern heights; pure rivulet carrying down its golden sands and gliding through the agora; beautiful plain of matchless fertility connecting mountain and river; splendid high-road crossing the brook on a magnificent bridge and running east and west until lost in the distance in both directions,—all these were covered by the city. Sublime must have been its background of mountain, with its snow-crested top, its acropolis piercing the clouds, and its magnificent views of the plain sweeping afar, both east and west, and with the Hermus extending so far into the distance as to become like a mere line of silver. This whole scene was described as one of incomparable beauty and fertility, lying, as it did, at the confluence of the Hermus and the Pactolus, and at the foot of Mount Tmolus.

Its location also made it a place of great commercial importance. It lay on the line of the great thoroughfares connecting the coast with the whole interior and with the far East. It was usually crowded by merchants and merchandise entering and departing in both directions. It was also the great center into which flowed immense quantities of the produce of one of the most fertile regions of Asia. The crops which were yearly gathered from the Hermus valley alone must have given rise to a vast market of themselves. The grain from the rich agricultural plains, the wool from the mountain slopes and vast pasture lands, the timber from the forests of immense trees, and other produce of the farms, must have given rise to great mercantile activity. Especially must the famous golden sands of the brooks from the mountains have awakened an extraordinary industry, as well as furnished the means for sustaining it. All these, as well as the sardonyx gems which gave to the place its name, and the fragrant woods peculiar to the region, conspired to make it a center of much wealth and mercantile life.

### 3. THE CITY AS IT WAS.

The real greatness of Sardis had long since passed away when this message was addressed to the people of God who dwelt

therein. Still, it is more than a matter of curiosity with us to endeavor to know all we can of it in its brightest and best days. The full understanding of the people to whom these words from heaven were addressed requires that we should see the city at the zenith of its greatness, as well as in the partial decline into which it had fallen when it first heard the gospel from the lips of apostolic men. It was one of the spots of earth on which humanity worked out the sublime destiny to which it was ordained, and we need to study the various stages through which it advanced. Of its very earliest days we know but little with certainty. Its condition during those remote ages was connected with old tales that are half mythical and half historical. We know enough, however, of what it was in those fabulous times to make our studies of them both satisfactory and profitable.

It was undoubtedly one of the most opulent and splendid of the cities of the East. The proverbial expression then generally applied to it was: "Sardis, the beautiful capital of Lydia." For a long period it was the residence of the monarchs of that country, and continued to be so until the time of Crœsus, the greatest and last of its kings. So great was this city that history has always given it a place in rank with the capital of Egypt, with Damascus, with Tyre, and with Susa, the residence of the Persian kings.

There was nothing for which Sardis was so much famed in its day as for its wealth. Its manufactures and commerce, its agricultural products and mines, were such as to make it opulent and great. For these, and for its luxury, there was probably no city of its time that would compare with it.

Every feature of the site which it occupied was such as to give magnificence to the city on whose adornment wealth and royalty put forth their utmost powers. But few cities of either ancient or modern times had such a view to present as that which lay before the eye from the lofty acropolis that towered above palaces and temples, markets and busy life. Higher still than the acropolis, from the mountain peak behind it a wider view could be obtained and the eye sweep beyond the river to the far north or south, and revel in the beauties of majestic forests and the gleaming water of a lake, and glittering palaces and smiling fields of richest verdure. On a closer view from our lofty observatory we behold, on either side of us, spread over the mountain slopes, the elegant residences of the rich and the great. Yonder, apparently at our feet, on the south of the plain, is the splendid

white marble temple of Cybele, with its perfect pillars—two of which are still remaining. Yonder, washing that temple wall, is the silvery stream of the Pactolus foaming over the rocks, down from the mountains, through the agora, on to the river, and bearing in its sands the wealth that shall spread over many a land. Yonder are the noble bridges here and there crossing the stream, connecting the two parts of the city, and carrying over them the great roads of merchandise and pleasure. Yonder are the nameless edifices, so costly and beautiful that their ruins have outlived the decay of centuries, and still fill the traveler with amazement.

Such was the material grandeur of the place; but what of the people who then inhabited it? It is sad to know that all their wealth and luxury but served to make them the more voluptuous and corrupt. They may have had worldly elegance from their great affluence, but they were debased in their lives. They were proverbially corrupt, even in that age of general corruption. This is shown by the very significant expression in the message: "*even in Sardis.*" "A few names even in Sardis," intimates that the place was so utterly debased that this was scarcely to be expected. That there were even a few unspotted ones there was to be the more wondered at, since all around was so deeply degraded. It could hardly have been otherwise considering the tone of the message. Their dominant worship was that of the great mother-goddess, Cybele; and that worship, it will be remembered, with its eunuch priesthood and its orgiastic rites, was one which tended, as much almost as that of Dionysos or Aphrodite, to sins of a foul and nameless impurity. In the midst of such a population, rescued from such a cultus, we have to think of the small community of disciples who were addressed, through their angel, as the church of Sardis.

At the time of the messages, Sardis had declined much from its former greatness and elegance, but it was still a place of great importance. Seventy years before, it had suffered greatly from an earthquake, the dread scourge of all that country. After that, as is often the case, there had followed a dreadful pestilence. But time passed—three-quarters of a century had enabled it to recover. It had risen again so as, above many other cities, to have the honor of erecting a splendid temple to the emperor Tiberius, who had aided its people in the season of their calamities. At the time when the heavenly message came, it was again a fairly flourishing community.

4. ITS HISTORY.

So influential were its fortunes considered in their day that it is related of the famous Persian, Xerxes, that, on hearing that it had been seized by the Greeks, he commanded a servant to cry aloud every day when he was at dinner: "The Greeks have taken Sardis!" From its convenient place in the country and the extreme fertility of its surrounding soil, it was a mart of commanding influence. On account of its great wealth it was always an object of much cupidity and many long sieges. Its history extended through the period running from B. C. 716 to A. D. 1430, *two thousand one hundred and forty-six years*. It naturally divides itself into seven periods: the mythical period, to B. C. 716; the Lydian period, to B. C. 548; the Pergamese period, in a very short time merging into the Persian period, and the Persian period, to B. C. 214; the Grecian period, to B. C. 187; the Roman period to about A. D. 400, and the period of Islam and the Turks, to A. D. 1430, or the present time.

As to the first, the period of myths and fables, we are not able to fix upon any definite time of its commencement. What we know certainly is that toward the close of the period it passes into the light of history, and we may establish its boundary at about B. C. 716. We have data enough to make it certain that it was a royal city, the seat of a powerful empire, even before the founding of Rome. It was a place of renown before the purple dye was used in Miletus, or civilization was acquainted with "Corinthian brass." "Herodotus, the father of history, gives us the early story of Sardis, which is interwoven with that of the old dynasty of the kings of Lydia. At first only a collection of wattled huts, it increased in importance, as the kingdom of which it was the cradle overspread the western portion of Asia Minor."

At the time when it first emerged into the light of well-authenticated history—that is, about B. C. 716—there were many important events occurring in other parts of the world. Romulus had just been murdered by the Roman Senatus; Media became a kingdom; Sennacherib was king of Nineveh; the Babylonian captivity of Israel was occurring; Hezekiah was king of Judah; the awful miracle of the slaughter of 185,000 of the Assyrian army by the angel of death was scattering dismay on every hand; the first eclipse of the moon was observed by the Chaldean sages, and at that time the calendar was reformed by the year being divided into *twelve* months instead of *ten*, as it had been before. Amid

such memorable events as these, Candaules, the first historical king of Lydia, appears, and from that date forward we can trace the outlines of its history with a tolerable degree of accuracy. We trace its annals down for 162 years until the time of Crœsus, the last and noblest of its kings. Under him Sardis reached the pinnacle of its greatness; but then it fell, its highest glory departed, and from that time forward its prosperity declined more and more.

The crisis in which the dominion of the Lydian kings came to an end is one of the saddest events of history. We may not pass it over without special notice. In the year B. C. 548, its king, Crœsus, became involved in war with the neighboring nation of Persia under Cyrus. The Lydian forces were defeated, and pursued to their capital, where they were again conquered. Crœsus retreated to his last stronghold in the Acropolis of Sardis, which was supposed to be impregnable. But his confidence was ill-placed, and the capture of that hold became one of the dreadful romances of history.

The sway of the Lydians came to an end, but the city lived on; and as, before, it had revived after its destruction by earthquake and pestilence, so it arose again as a city, though not as a government, after the fearful overthrow of war. The city flourished again, so that it existed when Alexander the Great passed through it on his victorious expedition. It surrendered at once, after the battle of Granicus, and his army encamped by the Hermus near by. Having ascended the citadel, then fortified with a triple wall, he resolved to erect in it a temple and altar to Jupiter Olympus, on the site of the royal palace of the Lydians. Under his auspices Sardis again became a magnificent city, but it never attained to its former glory. From that time forward it declined, and, though for centuries it was still one of the important cities of Asia Minor, it was never more the Sardis of Crœsus or of the Pergamese.

Another of the calamities which seem to have attended all its history was in the year B. C. 214, when it was taken and sacked by the army of Antiochus the Great, and for a time passed under the dominion of the Macedonian kings. When these were defeated by the Scipios at the battle of Magnesia, it passed into the hands of the Romans, and became the seat of the prefect of their province of Asia.

This introduces the Roman period, of almost six hundred years—the period of its history which is to us the most interesting, because in it the people received the gospel, its church was founded, and

this message was sent from the heavenly throne. During this period it was that the affairs of Christ's kingdom began visibly to influence the movements of this great earthly kingdom, and we search in the annals of Sardis for the progress of the Church of God. We may not, at present, enter upon the subject of the advent of our Lord, with its immediately subsequent events, and merely name one or two of the more prominent features of the Church's earliest history in connection with Sardis. One of these is the sad record of the sufferings which the brave followers of Christ endured from persecution as they labored to establish the gospel in its first ages. No pen ever has described, or ever can fully describe, their multitude and their cruelty.

The last of the periods under which the history of this city may be studied commenced A. D. 400, and continued for over six hundred years. At that time it was attacked and ravaged, amid wi[illegible] scenes of bloodshed, by the Goths, who plundered it without res[illegible]hist or remorse. Then followed years of disaster until it [illegible]ually wore away into the confused ruin which is all that the traveler now beholds. It passed through many strangely sad changes, among which it may be specially noted that the temples of Sardis were restored and reopened, and its churches closed, by Julian the Apostate, in his vain effort to resuscitate a defunct idolatry; and in the year A. D. 400, during the first invasion of the Goths, Sardis was ravaged and plundered. It remained, however, a wealthy and prosperous city for six hundred years, until its final capture by the Turks in the twelfth century; but for many years before this it had been exposed to the incessant inroads of the hordes of Islam. These incursions, in which all the male prisoners were slaughtered and the females carried off, had rapidly diminished the Christian population; its trade was gone, and the greater part of the surviving inhabitants preferred a more obscure refuge in the mountain fastnesses of Tmolus, until Tamerlane the Tartar carried fire and sword through Asia Minor, in the first years of the fifteen century, and so utterly devastated Sardis and scattered its inhabitants that no attempt has since been made to plant even a village on the spot.

Even the most cursory glance over the city's history will leave on the mind a deep impression of the instability of human things. That history is a most excellent type of the vicissitudes of nations: inventions, glories, shame, great men, battles, sieges, follow each other, in uncontrollable succession, until all are passed away, and nothing remains but marble fragments. Nay, much does remain

—not in material monuments, but in the impression that each has made on the character of our common humanity. Races passed away from the ken of history, Lydians, Pergamese, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Goths, Mohammedans and Turks—such is the wonderful succession in the inhabitants of this old city. What must be the picture to the Eye that can look upon all cities, and all classes of men who have dwelt therein?

### 5. GOLDEN SANDS.

Among the many remarkable things connected with this city, one was the name of "Golden Sands" with which it was always connected. We have already seen that back of the city there lay against the horizon a great mountain-range; and that, from those mountain heights, with their peaks of never-melting snow, there rushed down a beautiful brook called the Pactolus. In the foaming waters of this stream were innumerable particles of gold which it had washed out of the rocks over which it passed, carried over the plain, and deposited on its strand, through the agora, and along its course to the great river into which it emptied. This precious deposit never ceased to be made as the brook rushed on, whether by the swollen winter torrent or by the gleaning expanse of the sleeping summer's flow. This was the source of much of the city's wealth. Like many other gold-fields, it was long since exhausted. By the time of Augustus it had ceased to produce the precious metal.

### 6. CRŒSUS.

The greatest name connected with the history of Sardis is that of Crœsus, its last, most honored, and most unfortunate king. Crœsus and Sardis are two names which history has made inseparable. Sardis cannot be thought of without Crœsus. He was a great monarch; for the man who stood at the head of such a nation as Lydia, with such a capital as Sardis and holding such an eminent position among the nations of earth, must necessarily be greatly renowned and honored among his fellow men. He was great because of these and other things for which he was famed throughout antiquity; but greatest of all because of his wealth. "As rich as Crœsus" is a proverbial expression known to every one. Even though the epoch of his life has so long since passed away, we can gather many hints and allusions which make it certain that his treasures must have been immense. No one who had not millions at his command could have erected those costly

temples, magnificent palaces and other grand structures which bore his name. The treasures which he sent to the temple of Delphi, and the collections of gold and precious stones, of paintings and statues, which he exhibited to the philosopher, Solon, revealed the countless hoards of his riches. Perhaps, however, the most significant of all was seen in the enormous amount of ransom he was able at once to pay the king of Persia, into whose hands he had fallen captive in the battle which ended at once his glory and his reign. That ransom, it is upon record, amounted to the immense sum of $631,320,000, the largest price of liberty that was ever offered. It is no wonder that he was elated by the possession of such countless thousands of treasure, that it should even make him vain, and that he should sometimes show that vanity before the obsequious courtiers over whom he reigned with absolute dominion. An instance is on record in his interview with Solon, the great lawgiver and philosopher of Greece. In the course of his travels, the Grecian sage was visiting the Lydian king. After ostentatiously displaying to Solon his splendors, the monuments of his great victories, and especially his enormous riches, the king asked him "who was the happiest man he had ever seen," not doubting but that compliment would be paid to himself. Solon, however, first hesitating, and going over certain other names, finally replied: "The gods are jealous of human prosperity, and no one can be called fully happy till a happy death has closed a happy life."

This reply proved ominous for the Lydian king, who became as eminent for his misfortunes as he had been for his prosperity. In an evil time for him, he became involved in a war with Cyrus, king of Persia. Three times over was he defeated in a most disastrous manner—when he went out and met the enemy in open field; on the great plains before his own city gates; and at the fancied impregnable fortress of his citadel. In the last of these he was captured and was doomed to be burnt alive. His victorious enemy remorselessly gave order for the execution of the sentence. Bound in chains he was placed on the fagots which were piled up for the flames. Then came to his mind the warning of the Grecian sage, and in the depth of his woe he cried out, "O Solon! Solon!" The strange words reached the ears of Cyrus, and he held back the torch for a moment to ask their meaning. The victim promptly explained; the touching incident reached the Persian's heart; he was melted; caused the execution to be arrested; released the unhappy man; subsequently learned the

excellency of his character; and ever afterward made him his most trusted and valued counsellor.

The real greatness of Crœsus came to light after this terrible lesson of adversity, when he put the proper estimate upon worldly prosperity, cultivated the highest art, practiced the noblest virtue, and proved the wisest and best of friends.

### 7. OBJECTS OF PECULIAR INTEREST.

(1.) *The Acropolis.*—The first and most remarkable of these peculiar objects is the Acropolis. It was situated at the southern extremity of the city, at the point where the structures impinge upon the mountain which overtops the whole scene. It was in fact a peak of the mountain that stood out in the plain which the buildings covered. The material of which it is composed is not a cemented concrete, but it is a heap of rounded pebbles mixed with sand. In consequence of this peculiar formation, the washings of winter torrents have torn its face into crevices and gullies which give it a peculiarly jagged and wild appearance. Earthquakes, too, have gashed it into cracks which are of frightful dimensions. Its magnitude can be imagined from the fact that, on the north, or side of the plain, it is one thousand feet high, and, on the other, or mountain side, it is five hundred feet down to a valley which separates it from the general mountain mass. So steep is it that, excepting by a single path, it is impossible to climb up its face from the city.

The view from the heights of this Acropolis is grand and interesting. All around it was stretched the great plain on which the city and its suburbs stood. Even now, what splendors of nature! what memorials of a mighty past! Look in any direction, and what do we see? Yonder, the ever-flowing Pactolus! Yonder the mysterious Gerusia, of glorious fame! Yonder the immense mausoleum of the kings of Lydia! Yonder the gleaming waters of the Gygæan Lake, with Diana's temple on its bank! Yonder the beautiful "Valley of Sweets," and yonder the old, far-famed Hermus flowing on to mingle with the waters of the Ægean! Mr. McGarvey, a modern traveler, gives this description: "I have seen nothing in my travel more magnificent than the view which it" (the Acropolis) "affords. To the south, across a rough intervening valley, rise the mountains of Tmolus, about 2000 feet high, and here thickly wooded. To the west, across a narrow valley, is a ridge like the one on which we stand, jagged and peaked in the wildest manner. The ruins of

the temple of Cybele are in this valley—its two columns that are still erect standing in loneliness amid a mass of marble blocks lying in confusion about them. To the north the eye takes in the valley of the Hermus, which stretches to the right and left until it is lost in the dim distance, and it traces the serpentine course of the river itself for many miles along the valley. We see, just before us on the bank of this stream, the place where Alexander the Great was encamped when Sardis opened her gates to him without resistance, and we gaze on the same landscape which he beheld when, standing on this very Acropolis, he resolved to build a temple to the mother of Jupiter. Still nearer, in the plain is the battle-field in which the army of the rich Crœsus was defeated by Cyrus, after which event the city fell into the hands of this Persian conqueror."

(2.) *Mountain Back of the Acropolis.* The next object worthy of special description is Mount Tmolus, which rises up back of the Acropolis, and ascends, ridge after ridge, above the clouds and terminates in peaks in perpetual snow. This was an object that evermore was in view of the inhabitants of the city. It was remarkable for its color as well as for its height and strangely weird shape. This, in the region above trees and all other vegetation, was of a reddish sandstone, which, in contrast with the greenness of the trees, and with the sun's rising and setting, must have been singularly wild and varied. But we can impart the best impression of the whole scene by quoting the description by Arundell, whose eyes often rested upon it:

"The appearance of the hill of the Acropolis from the opposite bank of the Hermus" (five miles distant) is that of a triangular insulated hill, close at the back of which rise ridge after ridge of mountains, the most elevated covered with snow. On approaching close to it, the hill, as well as most of the mountains at the back, are perceived to be of a reddish sandstone, and those at the west especially, as well as the Acropolis itself, of the most extraordinary and fantastic outline; the crumbling nature of the sandstone will in part account for this; but a more satisfactory solution will be found in the terrible earthquakes which have so often changed the face of Asia Minor, raising, according to Tacitus, valleys into mountains, and depressing mountains into valleys. Certainly no inferior agency can account for the jagged and disturbed forms of the peaks of Mount Tmolus for a considerable distance from Sardis towards Smyrna."

(3.) *Ruins of Cybele's Temple.*—Of all the wonders, in and

around Sardis, the mere work of human hands, the one which attracts the most notice is that of two mysterious columns, which stand erect and silent. The traveler Hartley thus describes the first impression the sight of them made on him: "I was filled with wonder and awe at beholding the two stupendous columns of this edifice which are still remaining: they are silent but impressive witnesses of the power and splendor of antiquity."

They stand in the retired valley back of the Acropolis, and between it and the steep mountain. They are on the bank of the Pactolus, whose stream must have washed the foundations of the structure with which they were connected in the days of its glory. Towering up so high, so disconnected at present with other edifice, so solitary, so beautiful, and yet so much in ruin, they cannot but make a peculiar impression.

What are they? When were they raised? With what magnificent structure did they once stand connected? These are questions which rise in the mind of every one who contemplates them. It is probable that of Ionic monuments standing in such perfection, these are the oldest in the world. From inscriptions which have been found, it has been ascertained that they were a part of a great temple of the goddess Cybele, who was the tutelary deity of the city. There were formerly, but in comparatively recent times, six of them, which all belonged to the same structure of which they were a component part. The other four were still standing at the close of the last century; but the sacrilege of the Turks has torn them down to use their marble for lime, or to cut them into grave-stones.

It is likely that this temple of Cybele, of which they were the great ornament, was at least rebuilt by Alexander the Great, who, it is recorded, formed the purpose of erecting it while standing on the Acropolis and filled with admiration of the splendid objects which lay around him. Great must have been the skill, and vast the toil that erected these monuments; for though they have stood there for over two thousand years, no chisels could equal their workmanship even now; and the marble out of which they were wrought must have been brought from a distance; for none of its kind is found in the neighborhood of Sardis. According to actual measurement, they stood 35 feet above the surface of the ground, and careful explorations have traced them 20 feet beneath it—so that their whole height was 55 feet. Then a line which measured the circumference of each of them was twenty-one feet in length, making their diameter seven feet. They were

splendidly fluted, and their capitals were carved in the most exquisite manner—said to be the most perfect specimen of the Ionic order that has ever been seen. The temple of which they were a part, it is averred by those best qualified to judge, was second, in all its parts, only to the temple of Diana of Ephesus.

(4.) *The Gerusia.*—To the lover of Christianity, perhaps the most deeply interesting of all these ruins in Sardis is that which is called the Gerusia, or house of Crœsus. Unlike the solitary pillars of the temple of Cybele, it stands, on the plain west of the Acropolis, not alone, but in a mass of confused ruins of walls, rooms, and riven blocks of marble. The last purpose to which it is known to have been devoted was that of an asylum for poor old men; and, in this, it differs from anything else that has ever been found amid purely pagan archæology. I cannot recall an instance of any such humane institution adorning the annals of the old heathen world. No hospital, no asylum, no home for the poor, no refuge for the outcast and suffering, has history preserved as an alleviation to the dreary centuries that were without the good news of salvation and happiness. This cluster of ruins west of the Acropolis in Sardis, the Gerusia, is the only even apparent exception. It appears to have been a cluster of buildings, great rooms and halls and hidden apartments, which seem to have been erected from time to time as new or changed uses for them required. The walls were built entirely of fragments that had been rifled from other buildings which had existed previously. Throughout the whole mass of buildings a prevailing form seems to have been that of the brick arch resting upon marble piers. The character of the building when it stood at its prime may be conceived of from the immense size of its ruined halls, amongst the largest ever constructed, and with its walls ten and a half feet in thickness.

The fortunes of this strange building are as interesting as are its structure and the peculiarities of its ruins. Originally it had been a temple erected for the services of some one of the pagan deities. Afterward it became the residence of Crœsus, who expended immense sums in making it one of the most splendid palaces the earth has ever looked upon. At a later period it was changed into an asylum for old men, that was famous in that day. This it was which rendered it deeply interesting to all lovers of the gospel. First an idol temple, then the most splendid of palaces, and then one of the first asylums which the humanizing influences of the gospel prompted believers to erect

into a home and source of blessings for the afflicted. What a fit emblem did it prove of the humane influence of Christianity, which enters a nation, dark and degraded by paganism, and, spreads among its people not only the hope of a better life hereafter, but also a balm for present ills and a cure for present suffering!

### 8. DEITY OF THE CITY.

Cybele, the mother of the gods, held this honored place in the city of Sardis. That hers was the dominant form of worship, that she was the deity chiefly honored there, and that the centre of her authority was in that city, was the testimony of all antiquity. All the monuments and all the tendencies of worship there make this manifest.

According to heathen mythology, Cybele was the daughter of Cœlus and Terra—heaven and earth—the wife of Saturn, and the mother of Jupiter, Neptune, Pluto, and others of the supreme deities. The simple fact that she was the mother of Jupiter, chief of all the pagan gods, clothed her with the highest honor. Immediately after her birth she was left to perish in the mountain forests, but was nourished by the wild beasts, and received her name of Cybele from the mountain on which her life was preserved. Inasmuch as her origin was so near to the very fountain of all being—heaven and earth—most appropriately was she esteemed and served as the goddess of corn and harvests, the prime sustainers of life. From this rural dominion it came to pass that she was associated with rustic employments and sports, and, among other things, became the inventor, of the cymbal, an instrument used chiefly in such amusements. From this, too, came the name of the "cymbals"—most appropriately telling of Cybele, its inventor.

Not only was Cybele the special deity of Sardis, but she was also held in the highest esteem there, even in comparison with the tutelary deities of the other cities. This is shown by the splendor of her great temple, the ruins of which remain even to the present day. Those great, beautiful pillars stand on Sardis' plain as a monument of the supreme honor in which she was held by its inhabitants.

The annual celebration of her great festival, beginning on April 4th and continuing for six days, was attended with the most strange, weird revelry of ancient heathenism. At its unearthly orgies, her eunuch priests imitated the conduct of mad-

men, filling the air with dreadful shrieks and howlings, as if possessed with demons. They became frantic in the monstrous dances of the Corybantes, increasing the turmoil by drums and tabrets, bucklers and spears. The streets were filled with processions and crowds wild as maniacs. Theatres were thronged and were wild with the roar of noise and confusion. The most devout were those who were most like madmen in fury and who made the most hideous noises—all as tokens of woe in sympathy with Cybele over the untimely death of her beloved Atys.

The goddess herself was usually found in the centre of these scenes of revelry in her worship. Surrounded by her Corybantes, priests, howling and shrieking like madmen, and cutting their flesh with knives, she advanced in a chariot drawn by two lions. In her hand she held a sceptre and on her head was the turret—the symbols of royalty. These barbarous and repulsive rites were essential parts of her worship, which no doubt were often witnessed in Sardis.

There was significance in the fact that Cybele, or Ceres as otherwise named, should have been the deity of Sardis. As goddess of corn and harvests, she was the personification of the produce of the earth. She was the embodiment of the idea of agriculture, and, as such, she would have suited no other city so well as Sardis. It was in the heart of that land of husbandmen. The rich Hermus valley was probably the finest farming region of Lydia, or of all Asia Minor. The vast harvests of wheat, corn, wool, hay, and fruits, and of timber, all flowed into Sardis; hence the very personification of its life and wealth would naturally be Cybele, the goddess of fields and fruits, of flocks and forests.

This view of the position of the city will explain the character and peculiarities of the message. From it we can understand why we have as its central idea the condemnation, "A name that thou livest, and art dead." It was the spiritual condition of the church. It was not suffering from persecution like Smyrna or Pergamos, nor tempted to error like Thyatira; but it was comfortable, affluent, full, independent, and would therefore be likely to sink into slothful indifference. Like the farmer of our Lord's parable, it would naturally fall into the false security—"Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry!" and to lapse into the dangerous state of—"a name that thou livest, and art dead." It was precisely the state we might have expected of a lapsed community of farmers and tradespeople.

### 9. THE CITY AS IT IS.

We have already noticed so many special objects and events in the city, and it is so nearly all one scene of ruins, that but little remains for a detailed account of its present state. From one spot nearly all can be surveyed. In imagination we take our stand upon its Acropolis, as on the crown of the city—a huge craggy rock, with fragments of wall and broken columns lying around on every side, in fantastic confusion. From this observatory, as from no other, we can view the site, of incomparable beauty, once occupied by Sardis at the point where converge the mountain Tmolus, the river Hermus, the magnificent plain, and the celebrated brook Pactolus of the golden sands. The point of observation is itself one of grandeur, especially as seen from the other side, or north of the Hermus. The citadel, rising high up in the air, scarred and scraggy; back of it the towering mountain, ridge upon ridge, until the highest is covered with perpetual snow; the beautiful verdure covering the faces of its many slopes; and the fantastic shapes of crags cast up by a hundred earthquakes,—all conspire to form a scene of stupendous grandeur. From this watch-tower, the whole field that was covered by the ancient city and suburbs lies before us. Close by the Acropolis, and southward towards the body of the mountain, are the columns of the great temple of Cybele. Next towards the east are the ruins of the theatre and the race-course. After these, driven by the stream of the Pactolus, as it issues out into the plain, is the mill—the one scene of activity amid the wilderness of ruins. Behind these, again, come the objects, as Arundell well describes them, "of the greatest interest to the Christian traveler—the ruins of two churches; one said to be the church of the Panagia, and another, in front of it, the church of St. John. Of the former there are considerable remains, and it is almost wholly constructed of magnificent fragments of earlier edifices. It must be this to which Colonel Leake alludes, as being perhaps the only one of the seven churches of which there are any distinguishable remains; but there are also some remains of the church of Pergamos. Of the church of St. John there are several stone piers, having fragments of brick arches above them, and standing east and west." Most deeply sad is it to reflect that of these churches, to which no doubt the message from heaven was sent, nothing now remains but fragments of the piers from which their arches sprang. Out from the midst of these

ruins we see the little Pactolus, winding its course through the heart of the agora, across the whole width of the plain, and on to unite with the great river. Eastward still, our eyes rest upon what was once the "Valley of Sweets," in its day said to have been the most lovely vale of pleasure in Sardis—or in all Asia Minor. Gazing on, eastward and northward, we trace the Hermus, one of the greatest rivers of that country. Its sources are among the high mountain lands of the interior; its course is through a fertile region two miles north of Sardis, and onward until it empties into the Gulf of Smyrna. Now, sweeping over the beautiful stream, as it emerges from the haze of the far distant east and winds on until it is lost in the obscurity of the remote west, our eyes rest on objects of the north which are connected with sacred memories of former days. First and grandest of these is the Halyattes, the mausoleum built by Crœsus to the memory of his father, Halyattes, who preceded him as king of Lydia. A trustworthy traveler has thus described it: "The burying-place of the ancient kings of Lydia, which ranks among the wonders of the ancient world. On the top of a high plateau, on the other side of the plain of the Hermus, about six miles north of Sardis, is a vast collection of gigantic mounds, known by the Turks as *Bin-teppe* (the Thousand Mounds) which spread for a vast distance over the plain. It is the mausoleum of the dynasty of Crœsus. One of these, which towers far above the others, the monument of Halyattes, the father of Crœsus, is accurately described by Herodotus, and remains undisturbed by man to the present day. It is three thousand eight hundred feet in circumference, and one thousand three hundred feet in breadth. It rises at an angle of about twenty-two degrees, and is a conspicuous object an all sides. Herodotus tells us that it was raised by merchants, artificers, and women, and that there were marking-stones to show how much of the work each had done. When measured, the work of the women proved to be the greatest. Of these boundary-stones, one of a conical shape still remains on the summit of the mound; but its inscription, if there ever was one, has been completely obliterated by time. These amazing earthen pyramids have hitherto escaped the ravages of invaders, nor is there any trace of their having been ever violated by the hand of man."

Still farther to the north, about five miles from the river, lies the Gygæan Lake. It must have been an object of much attraction to the Sardians. About six miles from their city, so that

excursions would be made to its beautiful shores; surrounded by one of the most charming vales that can be imagined; swans and other water-fowl skimming over its surface; fish of many kinds sporting in its ripples; the story of the dancing buckets, and other legends, lending a charm to every spot around it; historical associations awakening a strong curiosity; the sacred temple of Diana, called Colœne, sending out its priestesses, as nymphs, along its shores—from all these we can easily understand how the pleasure-seekers of Sardis would cross the great plain, pass over the river, stray past the mysterious Hyalæthes, and spend romantic hours in this paradise of beauty.

Passing on westward and southward, the eye finally rests, in the western limits of the city, upon the Gerusia, in the days of its glory the palace of Crœsus, the temple of pagan deities, and the home for old men in poverty. Coming back again to the base of the Acropolis, we trace the course of the stream which of all objects was the most celebrated in the city—Pactolus of the golden sands. We see it leaping down from crag to crag of the overhanging mountain, until, no more than a silver thread, it flows out from Tmolus north-eastward over the plain, which it breaks up into a cluster of converging valleys. This was the brook whose precious sands were famed in song, and attracted adventurers from every part of Greece; but it is now little more than a mere swamp.

From our lofty watch-tower we can follow the outline of the plain on which chiefly the city was located, on which so many murderous scenes of war occurred, and which was once adorned with some of the most splendid of human structures. How great the change which has come over it! Extending, in length, from the distant east until it is lost in the west, on one side it is bounded by the Acropolis and mountain, on the other by the river valley. In every direction it is blooming with luxuriant thistles, and covered with stone and marble fragments. Here and there over it masses of brickwork, crumbling arches, and broken columns tell the story of its splendor in the days of its greatness and power.

One of the most significant monuments of the greatness of the old city and country is the evidence which the plain furnishes of having been traversed by a great highway, at once a military road and caravan route. Over that highway, in thought, we can trace the marching of conquering armies and trading caravans, of Persian satraps and Roman proconsuls, and trains of wor-

shipers from distant lands on their way to the shrines of Cybele of Sardis or Diana of Ephesus.

Nothing is more characteristic of the whole extent of country which the city once covered than the prevalence of ruins, ruins, ruins! Its location was exceedingly beautiful, but the territory over which it was spread is now almost a desert, and the valley is fast turning into a morass. All that one now finds there is the shelter of mud walls; for a great part of the ground once occupied by the imperial city is a grass plain browsed by sheep, two lonely and gigantic pillars, and massive fragments strewn about. The traveler Emerson thus describes it: "The first emotion on viewing these miserable relics is to inquire, 'Can this be Sardis?' Occasionally the time-worn capital of a ponderous column, or the sculptured surface of a shattered marble block, appears rising above the weeds that overshadow them; incongruous masses of overthrown edifices are uncovered by the plough, or the stone inscription of some hero's tale is traced upon the slab imbedded in the mud of the cottage wall; but Sardis possesses no remains to gladden the prying eye of the traveler, and no comforts to repay the toilsome wanderer in their search. The walls of its fortress that bade defiance to the successive armies of Cyrus, Alexander, and the Goths are now almost level with the surface of the cliffs on which they were once proudly reared; the vestiges of the palace of the Lydian kings are too confused to suggest the slightest idea of its form or extent; and the area of the amphitheatre is silent as the voiceless grave."

The most magnificent portion of the old city, which was on the brow of the hill, is now a wilderness of mounds covered with grass. Deeply impressive is the comparison of the spiritual state of the church at the time of the message, with the present ruinous condition of the city. "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." As was thus said of the degenerate church of Sardis, so of the city itself. A few miserable huts occupy its place. The black tents of the wandering Turcomans are scattered through the valley; the whistle of the camel-driver now resounds in the palace of Crœsus, and the song of the lonely thrush is heard from the walls of the old Christian church. A countless number of sepulchral hillocks beyond the Hermus, where sleep the dead of three thousand years, heighten the desolateness of the spot which the multitudes lying there once made busy by their living presence and pursuits. The summit of the Tmolus is bare, rocky, and snow-clad; a little

lower, its heights are covered with wood, and at the base there are high ridges of earth, and rocks with deep ravines. On one of these eminences, the sides of which are almost perpendicular, stood the ancient castle of the governors of Lydia.

Another traveler, standing on the spot, utters these impressive words: "I can readily sympathize with the feelings of him who wept at the base of the Pyramids; nor were my own less powerful on that night when I sat beneath the sky of Asia to gaze upon the ruins of Sardis from the banks of the golden-sanded Pactolus. Beside me were the cliffs of that Acropolis which, centuries before, the hardy Median scaled whilst leading on the conquering Persians, whose tents had covered the very spot on which I was reclining. Before me were the vestiges of what had been the palace of Crœsus. Within its walls were once congregated the wisest of mankind—Thales, Cleobulus, and Solon; it was here that the wretched father mourned over the mangled corpse of his beloved Atys; and it was here that the same humiliated monarch wept at the feet of the Persian who wrung from him his kingdom. Far in the distance were the gigantic tumuli of the Lydian monarchs, Candaules and Halyattes and Gyges, and around them spread those very plains once trodden by the countless hosts of Persia."

The condition and residences of the few miserable inhabitants of the place are as forlorn as can be imagined. Sardis, now, is simply a wretched village of mud huts occupied by a handful of Turkish herdsmen. The old mill on the Pactolus is owned by a Greek Christian, who, with his two servants, is the only Christian to be found in the place where once flourished the church of Sardis. The few herdsmen, the miller with his two servants, and a number of Turks tearing down columns and blowing them into fragments for lime and tombstones, or to find the treasure they were supposed to enclose—a vandalism which the civilized world should arise and prohibit—these are the only persons who are found in any employment there. So little Christianity remains in that old home of one of the seven churches that when a copy of the New Testament was offered to a priest of the Greek faith, sojourning there, he neither knew what it was nor would he accept the invaluable gift.

All travelers agree in describing the place as a scene of desolation and solitude. The strong language of one is: "Everything seems as if God had cursed the place, and left it to the dominion of Satan. Lydians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, and Goths have

all been swept away, and the lines of the Oriental poet have been realized: 'The spider hath woven his web in the imperial palace, and the owl hath sung its night song in the towers of Afrasiab.'"

Most impressive of all are the words of Arundell, to whom the whole ruin was perfectly familiar: "If I were asked what impresses the mind most strongly in beholding Sardis, I would say, its indescribable *solitude*. Like the darkness of Egypt, darkness that could be *felt*, so the deep solitude of the spot, once the lady of kingdoms, produces a corresponding feeling of *desolate abandonment* in the mind, which can never be forgotten." Lodging there for a night, Emerson wrote: "Every object was as distinct as in a northern twilight: the snowy summit of the mountain, the long sweep of the valley, and the flashing current of the river. There were more varied remembrances associated with the sight of Sardis than could possibly be attached to any other spot of earth; but all were mingled with a feeling of disgust at the littleness of human glory; all—all had passed away! There were before me the fanes of a dead religion, the tombs of forgotten monarchs, and the palm-tree that waved in the banquet-hall of kings; while the feeling of desolation was doubly heightened by the calm sweep of sky above me, which, in its unfading brightness, shone as purely now as when it beamed upon the golden dreams of Crœsus." The same traveler concludes: "Sardis, the capital of Lydia, identified with the names of Crœsus and Cyrus and Alexander, and covering the plain with her thousands of inhabitants, and tens of thousands of men of war—great even in the days of Augustus; ruined by earthquakes, and restored to its importance by the munificence of Tiberius; Christian Sardis, offering her hymns of thanksgiving for deliverance from pagan persecution, in the magnificent temples of the Virgin and Apostle; Sardis, again fallen under the yoke of a false religion, but still retaining her numerous population, and powerful defenses, only five hundred years ago;—what is Sardis now! Her foundations are fallen; her walls are thrown down. She sits silent in darkness, and is no longer called the lady of kingdoms. How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people!"

### 10. PLANTING AND HISTORY OF THE CHURCH.

We have very little information about the beginning of the work of the kingdom in Sardis. We have some general state-

ments about the first preaching of the gospel in the whole country, but we are not told much concerning this city in particular. No doubt the first messengers who brought the tidings of Christianity and the first gospel influences would follow the usual track of travel, over the Gulf of Smyrna and up the Hermus river until they reached the great capital of Lydia. We may appropriately conjecture, also, that merchants and other travelers up the great thoroughfare would tell the news of the strange religion that was springing up in every quarter.

There was evidently something peculiar in the way in which the gospel first found an entrance among that people. This we justly infer from the remarkable words which are found in the message: "Remember therefore how thou hast *received* and *heard*;" also another allusion: "Strengthen the things which *remain*." These are hints of something that is not given in full. "Remember how thou hast received and heard!" Does not this intimate, either that they had been favored by a visit from some apostle, or that some remarkable efflux of the Holy Ghost had been vouchsafed them? or that they had listened to the gospel tidings with peculiar avidity? or that their first love was so great as to excite special notice? or that they had made unusually earnest protestations of their loyalty to Christ their King? or something else was there so noticeable in those first days of their experience as to make their present lifelessness the more painful to contemplate. Whatever the precise reference may have been, it is certain that there was something because of which He reminds that church of a heartiness with which it received the truth at the first. Still other allusions prove that their love was very warm. "A few names, even in Sardis, which have not defiled their garments." Does not this take us back to the earlier, better days when robes of stainless purity were the prevailing characteristic of its devoted people? What blessed days in its past history, when, in humble cottage and lordly hall, the conversation of glowing hearts would be about the glories of the Cross, and the heavenly kingdom, and the happy prospects which were opening up before the world! Great must have been the joy of those first discoveries of the gospel and its blessings. Strong must have been the hold which it took upon the hearts of the people, since it enabled them to remain steadfast amid the seductions of that elegant capital.

The subsequent movements of the gospel in that city were sad indeed. At the beginning it was received with great joy and great power, but, unlike the church at Thyatira, its last works, in the

days of the Apostle John, were worse than the first; the gospel was indeed professed, but its vital influence was almost extinguished; and the majority of its members had lapsed into a state of carnal indifference and security. The people are described by the divine Inspector as having a name to live, but as actually dead; their works had not been found perfect before God; their love had cooled; their faith was expiring, and the anger of the Lord had been justly kindled against them. Apostasy from the faith brought with it the curse of God and the oppression of man, and the seat of this church of the Apocalypse may now be said to exist no more. The truth, however, had taken very deep root, so that it lived on, with some power, for several centuries.

*Melito.* The only bishop of Sardis of whom there is any mention during the first three centuries of the Christian era is Melito who lived during the last half of the second century, or some sixty or seventy years after the date of these messages. He was a man greatly honored, a valiant champion for the truth, of widespread reputation and influence. Of his numerous works enumerated by Eusebius, only a few fragments have come down to us. Among them was an apology for Christianity as the true philosophy, dedicated to the emperor Marcus Aurelius. A very valuable fragment from his pen has been preserved containing the first Christian list of the books of the Old Testament, which coincides with our received list except that it does not contain either Nehemiah or Esther, both of which it is probable were included in the book of Ezra. Very important is the fact that he does not embrace in his list any of the books of the Apocrypha. What he wrote on this subject is of great weight, as he had given careful and continued study to it, and had visited Palestine and Egypt in the course of his investigations. It appears also from hints and expressions found in his extant works that most, if not all, of the books composing the New Testament were at that early date collected into one body, and regarded as of canonical authority. Among his works enumerated by Eusebius, is *De Apocalypse Joannis;* the very fact of his writing such a treatise showing that the canonicity of that book was then accepted.

### 11. NAME OF THE SON OF GOD.

To such a people—fallen into spiritual deadness and torpor, the lamp of faith waning and almost extinguished in their heart—the Lord presents himself as one having the fullness of all spirit-

ual gifts; able therefore to revive, able to recover, able to bring back from the very gates of spiritual death, those who would employ the little last remaining strength which they still retained in calling, even when thus *in extremis*, upon him.

Rich beyond description is this title in its applicability to the peculiar condition of that church, and at that particular time. Every expression, every word, has its own special and important shade of meaning. "He that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars." Seven is in Scripture the covenant number, the number is symbolical of the whole of Christ's atoning work. The expression, *seven Spirits*, therefore indicates the whole agency of the Holy Ghost in applying to the soul the purchased redemption of our Lord. It is the totality of his influence in the work of saving men. We see in it the abundance and the suitableness of the Holy Spirit for meeting every want of the soul of lost and helpless man. The Spirit was the great promise of the New Testament. He was the reward of Christ's redeeming work, the climax of the gifts sent down upon men from our ascended Lord. The Spirit was promised then, as it had been promised before, and still is, according to the peculiar wants of the Church at the time. As used here, the seven, the totality of the Holy Spirit, denoted the sum of all the life which the Church needed. It was the Spirit of life, which alone could save that church which, without it, was lapsing into spiritual death.

Christ is here described as having the seven Spirits. He consequently knew well what was the value of life, the madness of those who were suffering it to depart, and the only method by which it could be revived. "The seven Spirits of God"—the whole power of spiritual life was his; that life he gave then, and gives still, in every instance. He knows every danger of the soul as it struggles with the enemies who would destroy its spiritual life and take away its hopes. He knows the sufferings through which the Spirit's influences were secured by him; what radical changes the Spirit works in the believer's heart, and what watchfulness is needed in order to retain its saving and sanctifying power.

Then, if the Spirit's influence is in the hand of Christ, and if he bestows it freely upon his people, we can easily see what insult to him it was when they esteemed it so lightly as to yield to the numbness of spiritual death. It was a slight to his grace. It was throwing away what he in mercy had bestowed. Great was

the indignity toward him in failing to appreciate that which he secured by such terrible sufferings, and which was of such priceless value.

Still another momentous truth taught by his bearing this title is that it was in his power and prerogative to restore that spiritual life which had been so sinfully cast away. The very fact that the fullness of the Holy Spirit's influences was in his hands, contained hope for the church that otherwise must have yielded to despair. Though they had sinfully forfeited all spiritual life, yet He who had originally given it could now restore it to them. Every day's continuance of this spiritual torpor was therefore to them a day of sin. The Son of man had the fullness of the Spirit, and he yearned to bestow it upon those friends beloved whom he had already received into the warm affection of his heart. The seven Spirits--the very fullness of the Spirit was his; and therefore it was in his power to grant them sincere repentance for having grieved away that blessed Agent on whom their all depended; to arouse to sensibility and life where now there was but wretched stupor; to warm the hearts that were rapidly yielding to the chill of spiritual death; to restore exhilaration and joy where had gradually crept over their hearts the gloom of despair; to send blessed life-currents over souls that had yielded to the influences of death; to vivify hearts and homes where spiritual decay was spreading its melancholy pall; to restore beauty and grace where the hideous forms of dissolution were creeping on; to bring back the soul well-nigh sunken in despair —in a word, to repair all the wreck, and ruin, and waste of the soul which they had sinfully produced, as if they were bent upon throwing it away, with all its sublime powers and interests.

### 12. THE CENTRAL POINT.

The substance of the message to this church was, "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." From the hint that is here given, as well as from other corroborative circumstances, it appears that among the churches of that day Sardis was famed for its spiritual vitality; but, at the same time, He who held the seven stars in his right hand pronounces them to be spiritually *dead*. This is the central point—the burden—of the message, around which everything else is clustered, and in which everything else has its meaning.

"Hast a name that thou livest, and art dead" is the dread sentence concerning it, pronounced by the lips of infinite wisdom

and truth. As the words in the original have it, it was not absolutely dead, as if nothing of life were left, but there was deadness—a condition whose tendency is death. The fatal brand is death. That church made high pretensions, among other churches of the time, of great life and spirituality; but He who seeth not as man seeth pronounces a different sentence. His doom concerning her was—*death*. In his sight, from which nothing could be concealed, her state is described in one word—*death*. He saw, as man could not see, that her life was gone hopelessly and for ever, unless a remedy efficacious beyond the skill of man could in some quarter be found. Sardis had a church, but its life was no more, and never would be again without divine intervention.

The decision concerning it was peculiarly emphatic—"a name that thou livest, and art dead." The other churches were diseased and festering in their most vital character—but here all was benumbed, diseased, and hopeless. All the spiritual life which its members professed was counterfeited, and its pretended goodness gone. So thoroughly extinct was its life that the mere name was but hypocrisy. In fact, the one word containing the charge against it was *hypocrisy*. Its antitype at the present day would be a hypocritical church; and to meet this, in any age, was the great object—the warning signal—of this message.

Its great value is that here we are shown what God thinks of any people who are in this state of high profession of life, but in reality of spiritual death. Terrible is the condemnation as coming from his righteous lips: "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." The language that is used in reprobation of their condition is not too strong. He heard their profession, he knew their heart; and the sight was loathsome to him. The deception, the meanness, the blasphemy, all lay exposed before him, and drew forth from him a more severe rebuke than that to any other of the churches. He knew the hearts of all the members in the seven churches, and, in his sight, some were wholly dead, some were almost gone, some dead in sin, some torpid; this one was in a fearful state, resembling a corpse, or statue, rather than a congregation of living members. The substance of the message to them was: I have all conditions in my sight, and though ye make a fair profession before men, ye are without life and beauty in my sight. Ye are loud in your profession, but to me the profession is only a name. This was a very lamentable state, for afterwards comes the exhortation, "Strengthen the things that

remain, that are ready to die"—implying that though called life, it was scarce worthy of the name.

Sardis, at that time, seems to have passed for an orthodox, blameless, living church; but this appearance of life, according to the judgment of the All-seeing, only concealed the reality of spiritual death. How significant it was that this was the condition of the church of Sardis above all others! Can it be that of all the churches of the seven, or of the world, it should be in this deplorable state? Is not Sardis famed all through the land as the most orthodox, intelligent, and consistent of all the churches? Did not Sardis, when the gospel was first preached there, receive it with the greatest ardor, and from that day forward stand forth as the very model church? Surely Sardis, the royal city, the home of culture and truth and enterprise, was capable of exerting the widest influence, and of doing most for the upbuilding of the kingdom of righteousness and salvation! What means it, therefore—can it possibly be that the brand of death should be stamped upon it above all the rest?

It is terribly ominous that we should hear this of the city and church from which so much might reasonably have been expected! It was—it must have been—a startling revelation at that time; but many a similar instance has followed it in after ages! This one was held up as a warning; and we shall not receive its full benefits unless we glance at some of those which are now so like it. We need not name them—they are to familiar to us. Look at some of the features which are common to them all. Find such churches, or such individuals, where or when we may, they are invariably well skilled in all the curious and perplexing questions in the Word of God; perfectly orthodox in all the traditional points of theology; unflinching in the externals of worship; unsparing in their condemnation of superstition and will-worship; but, at the same time, they are harsh, cold-hearted, and formal; hard and uncharitable toward all others of weaker faith; censorious of all those who do not see precisely as they do—in a word, they are dead to the vital, tender, and Christlike principles of real piety.

No matter what men may say, or think, here is our Lord's finger pointing to such lifeless churches and individuals. They are not deceiving him. Man looketh on the outward appearance, but He looketh on the heart. He knows them to be dead. In his name and by his authority and guidance we call upon them to awake and see what and where they are. We say to

them, Awake! arise, fear and tremble, ye children of those who received such solemn warning from the heavenly throne!

### 13. CENSURE.

In addition to the leading thought of the message, which is itself a terrible censure, there were in this message several allusions which indicated the lifeless state of that church. It was in a radically defective condition, as indicated by the charge against it: "I have not found thy works perfect before God." It had a good name for piety before the world, but God saw it through and through, and knew that before him it was corrupt. Its eminent devotedness was but a name. The all-seeing eye discerned that it was thoroughly hypocritical. So radical were its defects that a most solemn call was made upon it to repent.

There seems to have been in it an armistice with the surrounding paganism, as if, instead of battle, there was a friendly feeling existing between them. We hear from them no horror because of idolatry. There is no intimation of any aggressive movement upon the kingdom of darkness. This appears chiefly in that there is no allusion to any hostility from their heathen neighbors. Very impressive is the fact already noticed, that Sardis and Laodicea, the two wealthy and luxurious churches of the seven, were the only ones which were not persecuted. Quite remarkable is this about Sardis—that in the message there is no allusion to any enemy, or to any suffering, as there is in the messages to all the other churches, save Laodicea. All the others are addressed as being tried, tempted, persecuted. But there seem to have been no enemies or persecutors for Sardis. Probably this was because there was nothing to persecute. Their religion was not of that decided character that excites enemies. There was not positive piety enough to awaken opposition—scarcely attention.

It would seem as if the church of that city had sunken down into sad conformity with the world around it. This inference arises from two hints found in its message. One is the gracious consideration found in the praise given it, that they had a few names which still remained faithful; the other was that these few had not so fallen as to defile their raiment. All the rest seem to have sunken into that loathsome condition, but a few —only a few—remained upright and clean. Analogy teaches us that such defilement is the result of the contamination of the world. The church, as such, had caught the corrupt spirit

which was prevailing on every hand. There was no depth to their piety, no earnestness in their Christian life. There seems to have been in this church a sad lack of devoted personal piety. The language addressed to them implies this: "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." They seem not to have denied the truth as it is in Christ Jesus by any *word or profession* of apostasy; but they did deny it in *act;* they manifested their gross spiritual declension more forcibly than words could have done it. They cared not for purity of life and holiness of heart. Sardis was a gay and luxurious city, and it is more than probable that, in this respect, its church became conformed to it in character. On all sides they were surrounded by the abominations of their pagan neighbors, and most probably they joined in their heathen pastimes and festivities. By their pretense to pre-eminent piety they had gotten for themselves a name for religion, but God saw that it was not a name that came from the influences of his Spirit.

Only little grace was to be found in that church. This is manifest from the charge laid upon it: "Strengthen the things which remain." As if there was a little piety left—only a little—so little that unless it was carefully nurtured it would soon become utterly extinct. Only a little spirituality, only a few names remaining; it verily appeared as if the church, as such, was ready to die! They had a name that they were still living, but very little more.

Severe, therefore, but just, was the censure, that with a great name of spiritual life, they were as dead. They were absolutely ready to die. All was languishing, and on the borders of extinction.

### 14. A FEW NAMES EVEN IN SARDIS.

The considerate nature of the Son of God, of whom it is said, "A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench," is seen here, in that, while he was pronouncing a sore condemnation of this church, in order that they might not be utterly crushed he adds: "Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments." His gracious providence so orders that at no time, even in the most gloomy periods, is the Church without some sincere witnesses for the truth. There are always a few faithful names. Glance along the whole line of the world's history and see how emphatically true this is. A Seth, an Enoch, a Noah, an Abraham, a Lot,

an Elijah, an Ezekiel, an Augustine, a Simeon, a Luther, a Wesley, are at once thought of as proofs of this fact. It was so in Sardis, and is specially mentioned for the comfort of the faithful and to bear witness of God's never-failing goodness.

To encourage his people, he assures them that, even in that most forlorn condition of their church, he had a few faithful souls there who had kept themselves uncontaminated by the general corruption. There were a few; and that proved that true religion could live on, perhaps unnoticed by the world, even when the general mass was utterly depraved. It gives the same comforting assurance still; for while we see even a very few loyal to their God, and to the truth, we need not be cast down, although there prevails a most deplorable and widespread degeneracy.

Moreover, this allusion to the few faithful ones in Sardis reveals the blessed fact that, few as the steadfast ones may be, they are carefully watched over by the gracious eye of our loving Lord. Even a few are noticed; God takes care of the smallest number who are true to him. He will ever be true to those who are true to him. His unfailing engagement with every soul is, "Draw nigh unto God, and he will draw nigh to you." This old promise never, never fails.

Not only does he notice those who are faithful and true to him, but they are very precious in his sight. It would almost seem that the fewer they are, the more carefully are they watched over, and the more dear are they to him. He loves them so dearly that he writes their names in his book of life, calls them by name, and, in words of deep affection, says of them: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life."

Of these faithful ones in the church of Sardis, the various excellences are carefully noted. Of the mass of its members the record is that they had a name to live, but in reality were in a dying condition; these, on the contrary, had not only the reputation, but the character also which corresponded therewith. The great excellency of these faithful few in the sight of God is described by a very significant symbol: "They have not defiled their garments." All others had defiled theirs by coming in unholy contact and assimilating with their sinful neighbors. This does not imply that the few were wholly uncontaminated; but that, as compared with the corrupted professors, they were pure. They had kept themselves unspotted from the world; or, if they had contracted any defilement, they had at once washed it out in

the atoning blood, and secured pardon through our Advocate with the Father.

### 15. APPROBATION.

Though the great body of the church was spiritually dead, yet there were exceptions; even in Sardis, apparently the most hopeless of all, there were a few persons who were alive still. That faithful few were carefully noticed by the gracious Lord. Though it was a region of spiritual death, the all-seeing eye was fixed on the little handful that had not succumbed to the prevailing corruption. There was a general contagion of death; still were there some whom it had not reached. Vital godliness was unpopular and despised, but there were brave souls that faced all. They had to wage a constant struggle with the deadly influences that prevailed, but this only rendered their unyielding fidelity the more pleasing in the sight of Him who held them so tenderly in his hands.

This fidelity, so tried and brave, is placed in the most attractive light: "They have not defiled their garments." Pure, clean, unspotted, beautiful was their appearance in the sight of God and in the sight of all holy creatures. They had continued unspotted amid corruption most loathsome. So pleasing was this in the sight of the Son of man that he speaks of it to their special honor. Their purity, described as whiteness, was the more lovely as contrasted with such general defilement.

The gracious condescension of the loving Lord goes even farther, and, notwithstanding all the imperfections which must still have clung to them, he declares of them: "They are worthy." Worthy of the divine notice and honor—what a glorious tribute! They were worthy of approval, while all the rest were deserving only of condemnation. For the sake of Christ in whom they were accepted, and as a recompense to him, they were worthy of reward, and would be rewarded for evermore. They were of such a character as to be meet for admittance to the ranks of the blessed. "They were meet and proper persons to be admitted to that glorious and happy state, having approved themselves to be faithful servants and friends whilst they lived on earth." They were worthy of lofty seats in glory—worthy of all this for the sake of Christ, their all-prevailing Mediator. And this worthiness was the more honorable to them that they were found in the utterly corrupted church of Sardis.

16. COUNSELS.

After these encouraging words come the affectionate counsels of their tender Saviour. Every word of those counsels was adapted to their condition.

He first calls upon them to "repent." It was of the first importance that they should realize the sad state into which they had fallen; what they had lost; how grievously they had sinned and were sinning by their deadness; how much evil they had done, and the deplorable consequences that must follow. No impression could be made upon them, and no hope was there for them, unless they could be brought to reflect upon their wretched condition. They must humble themselves before even divine mercy could be extended to them, and before they could be awakened to other efforts which should be made.

Then he reminds them of what they once were: "Remember, therefore, how thou hast received and heard." He calls upon them to think of the time when with eagerness and delight they had listened to the gospel as it was first preached to them, with the demonstration of the Spirit; how their souls had been stirred; how earnestly they had sought, prayed, and cast themselves upon the truth; how fully they had believed; and with what joy they had then seen the Lord.

Then they are summoned to the most prompt and stirring watchfulness. The warning to them from the throne is, "Be watchful." Be watchful, for the torpidity of death is creeping over you; be watchful, for sooner than you are aware it will be too late; be watchful, for you are on the verge of death eternal. It is as if the alarm were sounded down to them: Awake! awake and watch! the numbness of death eternal is coming over you; your souls are becoming paralyzed, and you must stir yourselves at once or you are lost! Behold how weak are your faith, and hope, and love—they are almost gone. See how many fatal influences are benumbing you already—your spiritual life is growing more and more feeble; all around you is calculated to deaden; the accursed spells of Satan are binding you fast. It was a serious matter with them. There must be no more trifling, no more delay, no more sleeping. To them it was a matter of eternal life or eternal death.

17. THE THREATENING.

Having, it would seem, exhausted every kind and tender method to induce them to break away from their fatal torpor,

the Spirit then warns them of what would be the consequence if they would not heed him. If they would not be entreated there was nothing for them but to face the divine displeasure. The judgments of God would come upon them as unexpectedly as the thief in the night. He would come upon them in terrible visitations—not in the final judgment, here, but in severe chastisements that would be a type and foretaste of that wrathful and endless doom. They would be inflictions that would be the direct consequence of their sinful apathy—"such as persecutions, distress, the open shame of being noted as a dead church, exclusion from fellowship with other churches, which should no longer recognize even its name to live—these should do their work, teaching all who were yet capable of being taught, warning others by the punishment of the hardened and impenitent."

And these judgments would be sudden and unexpected. "As a thief in the night" is the feature upon which the greatest stress is laid. This was peculiarly significant because of the death-like torpor that had come over them. They were in a state like death, wherein their danger could not be perceived, nor the stealthy approach of calamities apprehended. They were so benumbed that nothing could alarm them until the horrible moment of awaking. One moment in a stupid, death-like sleep; the next, in a paroxysm of terror and woe! He would come upon them with bewildering alarm, with an irresistible power under which they would writhe in utter helplessness, with a crushing force from which they would find no way of escape, and in such a manner that they would be in agony from the discovery that all imaginable efforts were then too late. Such horrible awaking would surely come if they would not heed all other appeals that could be addressed to them.

### 18. OVERCOME WHAT?

The very fact that these dead professors of Sardis were called upon to overcome some enemy evinced that there was still some hope for them. Were it otherwise they would have been left in that deadness from which there was no renewing. But there lay before them a struggle that was formidable, unavoidable, and imminent. They must strive with an effort most intense, to break away from that spiritual numbness that had settled down upon their souls. Their wills had become enfeebled through the malign influences of sin, and so their task had grown to be far more formidable. They must contend with numbness, with an

enslaved will, and with a procrastinating spirit that binds faster and faster through the delusion that soothes them with the purpose of awaking—but not just now. There were also the three formidable assailants with which they must wage relentless war —namely, the world, the flesh, and the devil. The world was then, as always, dominated by the "prince of the power of the air," and its whole atmosphere was detrimental to their spiritual life. The flesh, with its many proclivities to evil, delighting in sinful indulgences, and with its old sedative, "A little more sleep, a little more slumber," was an unseen but most dangerous enemy. The devil, never resting, with cruel hate and infernal power, was a terrible, real, and mighty foe. The widespread tendency to deceive others, and themselves too, had already stamped them with the character of hypocrisy. The danger of getting nearer and nearer to the verge of ruin, utter and eternal, was becoming constantly more imminent. With all this they were summoned to contend, and the conquest over these dreadful foes was that to which they were called and which they must achieve.

### 19. THE PROMISES.

The victory could be reached only through a violent and long-continued struggle; but the rewards held out to the victors would be more than a recompense for all. Through mere mortal strength a conquest would be hopeless; but help would come from an arm that was omnipotent. The Lord of the kingdom would summon his followers to no undertaking in which he would not stand by them. He would not only afford them the necessary help, but he would also give them cheer in the most trying hours. In this message the promises are more than ordinarily exhilarating. A single assurance of heavenly reward, coming from the lips of Him who is the God of inviolable truth might well suffice; but here, to the faithful of Sardis, there are three promises, each of them more and more animating, and all of them perfectly adapted to the peculiar circumstances of that people: "I will not blot out his name out of the book of life;" "I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels;" "The same shall walk with me in white." If the languishing Christians of Sardis could have appreciated these engagements, what a new impulse they would have given them in the hard struggles through which they were called to pass! If regarded as they should have been, there would have been no despair even amid such general spiritual death. If God had only been heard and trusted, then the

conquest, hard as it was to reach, had already been gained. Let us look upon each of these promises separately.

20. "NOT BLOT OUT HIS NAME OUT OF THE BOOK OF LIFE."

To be enrolled citizens of Sardis, in those days, must have been one of the greatest honors. To have the name expunged from the registers of the city must have been one of the most dreaded calamities. It must have been a disgrace and a loss that would involve utter ruin. Corresponding with this would be the irreparable calamity of the soul whose name should be erased from God's book of eternal remembrance. It would be to seal the doom of that soul. It would be to make that wretched man a hopeless outcast, to shut him out from God's regards, and to consign him to the blackness of despair.

But this unspeakable evil would never be permitted to come upon the conquerors. Angels would carefully guard their names on the pages of the book of life. God himself would keep them engraven there. Never would they be effaced, never worn out by the lapse of ages. Their citizenship, with all its rights and honors, could never be taken from them. Their names would be mentioned by the ransomed, to the glory of Him who redeemed them, and to their own immortal bliss.

21. "CONFESS THEIR NAMES."

The names of these faithful ones of Sardis would not be blotted out, as would those of all the others who had not proved true to the Lord and his cause. When all others had been effaced, then would theirs remain most honored in the Lamb's book of life, as the elect and redeemed of God. Then, too, would their pre-eminent glory be made known before the world; for his engagement concerning each one of these loyal servants was: "I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels." This would be in fulfilment of his old promise while the Son of man was on the earth: "Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God." That would be setting his seal in heaven to that for which he had pledged himself on earth.

The substance of the engagement which he makes with these devoted followers in Sardis was that he would honor them by a special recognition before all the inhabitants of heaven. Before the Father the recognition would be: "These are they whom thou hast given me, who have been redeemed by my blood, and

who have followed me through good report and through evil report." Before the angels it would be: "These are the trophies of my victory, who have fought a good fight, and whom I have brought up to this scene of glory, that they may receive their crowns." Their names would be named, and their victories rehearsed. Before the Father, and angels, and the ransomed—in the most glorious circle of life—will they then be openly honored. What especially this glorious scene in heaven is to be, of course, we cannot now tell, but that there will be some splendid manifestation of such eminently faithful sons of God is made most certain. Even among the vast multitude of the ransomed, such unflinching heroes as these of Sardis will be raised to places of pre-eminent glory. Their names will be the more highly admired among the throngs of the blessed, in that they came up from the dead Sardis, as amazing trophies from that region of decay.

### 22. "THEY SHALL WALK WITH ME IN WHITE."

The glorified Son of God notices the few faithful ones of Sardis who had not defiled their garments, and engages to them that *they shall walk with him in white*. They had kept their garments unspotted while on earth, and they should walk with him in white in heaven. "He that overcometh shall be clothed in white raiment."

It is worth while to pause here for a moment and dwell upon the deep significance of the word *white*, as it is frequently used in the Apocalypse. "White is everywhere the color and livery of heaven, and nowhere with as great an emphasis as in this portion of the book." Of the Son of God we are told: "His head and hairs were white like wool, as white as snow." Then we have the "white stone," "white raiment," "white robes," a "white cloud," "fine linen, clean and white," "white horses," "*a great white throne*." The fitness of white to serve as a symbol of absolute purity is obvious. Then, this white as the color of heaven is not the mere absence of other color. It is not the mere dull white; but, as we learn from the transfiguration scene of our Lord, it is the brilliant, glittering white. It therefore refers to that clothing with light as with a garment that shall be in the heavenly world. The glorified body, transfigured into the likeness of Christ's glorified body, with its robe and atmosphere of light, will no doubt be that white raiment which Christ here promises to his redeemed.

One leading peculiarity of this promise is contained in the expression, "They shall *walk* with me in white." Here are many promises in one. It is the promise of life; for only the living walk—the dead are still. It is the promise of liberty; for the free walk, and not the fast bound. Much more, too, may we find in these words, "They shall *walk* with me in white," than if it had been merely said, "They shall be *clothed* in white." The grace and dignity of long garments appear only—at least only appear *to the full*—when the person wearing them is in motion. It is emphatic. "The scribes desire to walk in long robes." All this has its corresponding truth in the kingdom of heaven. God's saints and servants here in this world of grace, and no doubt in that world of glory, are best seen and most to be admired when they are engaged in active services of love. And such services they shall no doubt have. "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, If thou wilt walk in my ways, and if thou wilt keep my charge, then thou shalt also judge my house, and shalt also keep my courts, and I will give thee places to walk amid those that stand by." The redeemed shall walk with their Lord, shall be actively engaged in his service, and shall be glorified together with him.

They shall walk in white—adorned with both imputed and imparted holiness—enjoying holy activity and communion, and raised to the highest exaltation and glory. With what delight must this message have filled the faithful ones of Sardis! We can almost imagine, as it was said of them, "They are worthy," these elect and precious ones would sing in holy rapture, "Not unto us, but unto thy name, give glory." The message must have filled them with joy unspeakable; for it assured them that God had watched their doings, had approved their fidelity, and heard their prayers.

### 23. FUNCTION IN THE BEACON.

The essential element of warning to the churches of the world which formed the burden of this message was that all Christian communities are ever in danger of lapsing into a state of spiritual decay and deadness. This deplorable experience results from several causes. Sometimes it springs from over-confidence in the soundness of their faith. Trusting too much in the orthodoxy of their creed, they relax their guard over the vigor of their spirituality, suffer it to evaporate and lapse into dead orthodoxy. Very lamentable instances of this are to be found in the histories

of many churches. Sometimes it results from exhausted enthusiasm. Undue excitement in either an individual or a community is very often followed by a corresponding reaction; and that reaction is in danger of going on with accumulating force until souls are left cold, hard, and insensible. Sometimes the spiritual deadness comes from the blighting effects of prevailing errors. Error of every kind and degree is noxious, and, if not checked, ultimately poisons the whole soul, and by its contagion spreads throughout a whole community. Sometimes the whole spirituality of a church is smothered by the incubus of worldliness. Such, doubtless, was the sad history of this church of Sardis, as it has since been that of thousands of others. Worldly greatness, worldly prosperity, worldly riches, when not guarded, are blighting to the soul. Not that in themselves they are necessarily sinful in the sight of God, but that evermore is it the fact that God and Mammon cannot be supreme in the same heart. In the histories of these seven churches we have a most impressive proof of this. It is not to be mistaken that the churches of the wealthy Sardis and prosperous Laodicea were the most degenerate of them all; while the struggling Smyrna and the humble Philadelphia had the highest place in God's esteem. In these epistles, not so asserted in words, but exhibited in unmistakable facts, it is made abundantly manifest that worldly prosperity and vigorous spirituality do not ordinarily go together.

But it is also made evident by the light of the Beacon that even when the great body of a church was in a condition of spiritual deadness, there would still be some living and faithful ones in it. The true life which originally comes from the Holy Spirit would be indestructible. There might prevail an atmosphere most deadly in its effects; but there would be some brave souls that survive even it. The few names "even in Sardis" would be for ever an encouraging proof that an individual or a church need not despair though all around them seemed spiritually dead. And such noble few would evermore be a church's great blessing. They would bear the burden of the church's work, they would maintain the church's honor, and they would bring down the church's blessings.

The great duty of these faithful few—their noble privilege—would ever be to fan up into a new flame the feeble life that still remained in the body. To do this there would be no need for new methods, or for the contrivance of untried projects. Nothing would be required but the faithful use of the old means of grace

which God has ordained. These, however, would have to be plied with an earnestness which would amount almost to desperation because of the deadly atmosphere by which they would be surrounded. But the command—"Remember," "Hold fast," "Repent"—implied a divine pledge that such faithfulness in the "few" would not be in vain; the living and life-giving Spirit would help with effectual succor. This pledge of God stands good for ever. As it was given to the dead church of Sardis, so is it given to the dead or diseased church of the present day.

Most cheering also is the light of God streaming out from the Beacon, that the reward of such faithful ones would be all the greater because of their continuing firm and unharmed in the midst of so much that was calculated to destroy. Their fidelity would thereby be made to shine out with the brighter lustre. The trial of their patience would bring out their graces, burnish them, and render them the more attractive. The very contest with evil men and corrupting influences would make the more emphatic the voices by which they would be heralded to the triumphs of the skies. Justly would they, amid the ranks of the blessed, be celebrated as those who had come up out of great tribulation, having "washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Because of their heroic steadfastness to God and duty amid so much that was hostile, they would, for Christ's sake, receive from the heavenly King a special recompense, and be permitted to walk with him in white. Even amid the multitude of the ransomed they would be admired for evermore. In their struggles to live and triumph in the region where death prevailed they were planting memories which God would make to them an unending source of joy.

# PHILADELPHIA.

THE CITY OF GOD.

## THE MESSAGE.

And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth;

I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it: for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.

Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.

Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.

Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.

Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out; and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, *which is* new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God; and *I will write upon him* my new name.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

# CHAPTER XIII.

## THE CITY OF GOD.

### 1. CHARACTER OF THE MESSAGE.

"THE pearl among the churches" is a title once bestowed, and not unmeaningly, upon this church of Philadelphia. No one can carefully study the message which was sent down to it from Him who walketh in the midst of the golden candlesticks without feeling that this church was peculiarly dear to him. The tenderness of his addresses to it, his manifest consideration for its trials, as well as the number and nature of his promises to it, all show that of a truth he had "graven it on the palms of his hands."

This is the more remarkable in that it was but a small church, and located in a comparatively small city. It had not associated with it the renown of Sardis, or the splendor of Ephesus, or the influence of Smyrna, or the attractions of Pergamos. It was but a little inland city, consisting largely of farmers, lying far up amongst the burnt mountains, and of comparatively recent origin. As a tender parent to a weakly child, God speaks to it as having but "a little strength." The church was in fact weak in numbers and had but a few members for the work to which it had been called, and its graces had had but a short period in which to mature; and yet to no other church does he speak so lovingly.

Moreover, it was the only one of the seven which he addresses without using, or implying some words of censure. In this it is the single exception to the rule. The synagogue of the Jews in the city is sorely rebuked, but the faithful Christians who had come out of it had nothing addressed to them but the most cheering consideration. This fact is significant, standing as it does in the midst of such terrible rebukes to the other six.

There is something deeply significant in the names which, both then and now, were given to this church's honor. Was there not a special providence in it that the city of this church most beloved of the seven should have received from its founder the name of Philadelphia, the abode of brotherly love? What was there in it which led even its Moslem conquerors to bestow

upon it the appellation of *The Beautiful City?* It may have been in part the splendid site it occupied, looking over one of the most beautiful landscapes in the world; but was there not also something in its own character that imprinted on it that honored stamp? Then, most excellent of all is that Turkish name it still bears, the name *Alah-Shehr*—"*The City of God*"! The City of God—whence came that name but from the traditional sacredness of the place where that most beloved of the churches was watched over by her Lord?—a fame which the wear of many centuries has not effaced. It is certainly a curious illustration of this name that amid the ruins of the ancient city rises a tall solitary pillar; and in like manner among the ruined towns of Asia Minor stands Philadelphia—or, as it is now called, *Alah-Shehr*, "the City of God"—erect and unshaken. Still further, as to the original name of this city, is the singularly interesting fact that it has been perpetuated in William Penn's city of Philadelphia. On this an English writer has said: "Of all the seven its name alone appears in the catalogue of modern cities. The meaning of the word—'brotherly love,' or, 'love of the brethren'—perhaps also the special character of the promises connected with it in the Apocalyptic message, commended to the mind of William Penn as the fittest he could find for the city he founded on the banks of the Delaware; and so it has won for the name of the old Asiatic city a higher niche of fame than it would have filled in the world's history."

Another noticeable fact concerning the city of this church is that it had the longest endurance as a Christian city of all the seven. It stood out the longest of all against the murderous attacks of the hordes of Islam, still resisting and maintaining its independence for nearly a century after all the rest had fallen. And not only for this patriotic heroism but also for their morality and other virtues, were the people of Philadelphia celebrated above all the other communities of Asia Minor.

### 2. LOCATION OF THE CITY.

Excepting in very rare cases, cities have never been founded arbitrarily, but some special causes attracted them to their particular localities. Palmyra was built in an oasis of the desert as a central station between Syria and the nations on the Euphrates; Alexandria was located as a vast metropolis at the point of junction of Europe, Asia, and Africa; St. Petersburg was founded to be the one great seaport opening Russia to the commerce of

the world. Sometimes their positions are selected from purposes of trade; sometimes they are chosen as great centres of an agricultural region; very often they are founded with reference to their importance as military posts. With reference to this city of Philadelphia, we know historically why its site was chosen; and we can easily see from its physical peculiarities that its situation was wisely selected.

The great feature of the physical geography of this portion of Asia Minor is the running westward of two nearly parallel rivers from the highlands of the interior and emptying into the Ægean Sea. These two parallel streams are the Hermus and the Meander. Moreover, the space of territory which lies between them is mainly filled up by two similarly trending and parallel mountain ranges, the Tmolus and the Messogis, between which there lies a long and wide valley, traversed by a smaller stream called the Cayster. The Hermus on the north and the Cayster on the south almost encircle Mount Tmolus, coming very near to each other at its eastern base. The point on the east where, about seventy miles from the sea, the head-waters of the Hermus and those of the Cayster almost touch at the eastern end of the mountain, is where the city was located. It therefore stood at the edge of an immense valley or plain that lay up amid the head-waters and mountain spurs of the interior, some seventy or eighty miles from the coast.

More specifically may its location be understood by our saying that it lay partly on the spurs of the eastern point of Mount Tmolus and partly on the level ground at their foot; that from it there swept out a magnificent plain for five miles to the river Hermus which there bent around towards the south; that through it there flowed down from the mountains a large perennial brook called the Cogamus; that behind it towered up the snow-capped mountain peaks; and that before it lay a magnificent vista beyond the river, and stretching far up towards the eastern highlands. In this location the city possessed unsurpassed advantages. Its elevated position gave it a healthful climate, and its isolated situation, surrounded by mountains and far away from the excitement of marching armies, saved it from many of the horrors of war. The plain or valley of the Hermus secured for it all the wealth that could flow in from one of the finest agricultural regions of Western Asia. At the same time the two river-valleys of the Cayster and the Hermus, one opening on the coast at Ephesus and the other at Smyrna, secured

it the influence of the great highways of commerce extending from the Ægean islands up into the interior.

Besides the alluvial plain extending five miles to the river and spreading out for a long distance both up and down its banks, and forming the finest agricultural region in the country, there was also the river Hermus. This was the great artery of the land, which brought down from the elevated interior the washings of many thousands of acres, and imparted abundant fertility, as well as awakened life, by carrying the immense commerce. Besides this there was also the little stream Cogamus, which dashed down from the mountain, flowed through the city, meandered over the plain, and emptied into the river not far above Sardis. This brook was then, as it still is, one of the city's leading sources of wealth, owing to the quality of its water for producing the richest and most lasting dye. Many other brooks and springs, also covering the land, served to enrich and beautify its acres. Still another source of its fertility was that it lay on the border of what was called "the burnt country"—a vast space over which volcanoes had scattered their desolations. But these very volcanoes, showering their ashes on all the surrounding regions, had imparted to them a wealth of vegetation to be found on hardly any other spot of earth. As in the region of Naples, because of its proximity to Vesuvius, so about Philadelphia: the richness of its ground was marvelous. In the culture of the vine it is excelled neither by Naples, nor Burgundy, nor the banks of the Rhine. Add to all this that the region was sheltered by the surrounding mountains, and that, even so protected, it lay a thousand feet above the level of the sea, and then we can appreciate why it was so much renowned by Homer and others as one of the most delightful spots that man has ever inhabited.

### 3. A LAND OF EARTHQUAKES.

But there was one deplorable drawback. It was then, as it still is, afflicted by the horrors of earthquakes—and that beyond almost any other spot in the world. This is the calamity of all Asia Minor; and this seems to have been the very centre of their devastations. How great a drawback this was to the country may be seen from the fact that, though it had so many advantages as a residence for man, it never was fully occupied with inhabitants, and its acres never were thoroughly cultivated. Of this fact there is evidence but too positive from the testimony of ancient authors, as well as from the traces of the ruins that have

been left, and from the assurances of modern travelers. Such writers as Strabo in ancient times not only assert the fact of such visitations, but also describe their desolating effects. Excepting in Japan, where they are almost of monthly occurrence, it is questionable whether, along all the coasts of the Pacific and Mediterranean, which are the homes of earthquakes, they have ever done such destructive work as in this fair region of Philadelphia.

Only about seventeen years before these messages to the seven churches one of these visitations had almost ruined this city. Thousands of the inhabitants were overwhelmed in its first shocks; thousands of others fled from the tottering city and took refuge in the country around. At the time of these messages the city was only just recovering from these shocks, and was still very poor from the expenses needed to repair the ruins. The condition of the place may be inferred from an incidental remark of Strabo that the walls were even then utterly unsafe.

In after ages it was still the same; for in almost all historical references to the city of Philadelphia there are allusions, in some way, to the earthquakes by which it was so frequently suffering. A reliable author states that "It was constructed with little solidity in its edifices, as being extremely subject to earthquakes. These phenomena were most dreadful in their effects in the seventeenth year of the Christian era, for then twelve of the principal cities of Asia, particularly this and Sardis, were nearly destroyed."

The reality and dreadful character of these calamities upon Philadelphia and the territory in which it is situated may be imagined from the fact that it lies on the border of what was called the *Katakekaumene*, or flame-destroyed region. This is a large tract of country, sixty miles long by fifty wide, bordering on the Philadelphia region on the north-east, all of which has been burnt over and blasted by volcanic fires. It looks as if a wild region of tortured and billowy waters had been instantly petrified in the midst of their rage, and then swept over by flames. Such a district bordering on the plains of Philadelphia, and from age to age raining down upon it showers of volcanic ashes, must at once keep the plain in terror and give it the richest soil, like that around Naples, over which Vesuvius so often sends its lava-floods.

We have dwelt upon this peculiarity of Philadelphia and its neighborhood because the message to this church evidently received its special tone and character therefrom. All the messages

were shaped according to some peculiarity of the churches and cities to which they were addressed, but this one was most emphatically so. Not only in its general tone and form, but also in its every element, it is plain that its words had some reference to the earthquakes. The message touches that calamity of the land at every point. It is woven into the very texture, warp and woof, of the divine communication, and gives its impress to all.

We can easily see the great influence the frequent horrors of earthquakes must have had upon the city. In no other way can we account for the remarkable fact that, notwithstanding the combination of splendid agricultural stretch of land, streams and springs of water, beautiful scenery of mountain and valley, location on the great highway of commerce, and most salubrious climate, the city never grew to any surpassing magnitude, the country was but sparsely inhabited, and the fields were but poorly cultivated. It was undoubtedly because the dread of earthquakes prevented people from settling there. In fact, as was significantly written by Strabo, it was a wonder that any remained in such a dangerous locality. It is more than probable that this dread for ever hanging over the city was what kept it comparatively small, that its inhabitants were still kept poor by the necessity of constantly repairing the ruins caused by the shocks, and that on this account the city could never prosper very greatly.

The influence must also have been very great upon the character of its church. Can we not find here the chief causes which kept it so small and weak as it manifestly was? The congregation would most likely be made up of people who were very poor—so poor that they could not leave the city; for who else would remain in a place over which such terrible danger was ever impending? It is possible, too, that this same thing gave depth to their piety by keeping them humble through the feeling of their dependence upon God's protection every moment, and by leading them to live in a state of readiness for eternity, into which they might be launched at any moment. This must have helped the tone of their spirituality. The very imminence of danger was no doubt one of the leading causes for the earnest Christian life of this church—against which, as we have said, there is not one word of complaint. See, then, how this curse was turned into a blessing! Was it not a marvelous thing that this church, most of all the seven exposed to destruction at every

instant, should have long outlived all the others—should have at least the form of a church of God until even the present day?

This peculiarity of the place gave character and force to all this message. There is scarcely an expression or an allusion in it which may not have had, and which did not probably receive, its peculiar tone or color from the condition of the church in this respect. The firm locking and opening of the door by the sole hand of Him who was the Truth hinted at the stability or the shaking of the earth; the "open door" at the rushing out from the crash of the earthquake; the "going no more out," at the danger from the destruction of the earthquake; the "pillar in the temple," as standing firm, while all else was falling into ruin from the earthquake; and the "coming quickly" at the unexpected alarm of the earthquake. Almost every point of the message is shaped from this; the name of the Son of man, "the holy and the *true;*" the applause—hast stood firm against temptations to deny his name; the promises—kept firm and safe while all else is tottering to ruin, and the marking with the everlasting name; the charge solemnly given—Hold fast thy crown; and the central point—"set before thee an open door"—all had their peculiar form from the ever-impending earthquake.

### 4. THE CITY THEN.

Compared with the other six, the city of Philadelphia was small and had but little renown. It was never much noted in the annals of history. It was not marked as the site of any great crisis of the world. We read of no splendid buildings, no celebrated events, no very eminent men, and no decisive battles there. In all these it was insignificant as compared with Ephesus, or Sardis, or Pergamos. Perhaps it was overlooked through the celebrity of Sardis, which lay only twenty-five miles below it on the river. Its chief eminence in history was that, in importance, it was the second city of Lydia; that by the bravery of its inhabitants it stood out against the invading Turk for nearly a century after all the other cities of the country had yielded; and, above all, that it had the honor of having received one of these communications from the throne of God. To our American Philadelphia it has a special interest as having favored it with its significant name.

The site of the city was well chosen: on the extreme eastern point of Tmolus—rising on the coast and running back into the country about seventy miles—with mountain behind it, and the

largest, most fertile, and most beautiful level farming region of all western Asia sweeping around it in every other region. It stood at the foot of four mountain spurs, partly on the rising slopes and partly on the plain. It was located twenty-five miles higher up the river than Sardis, and about five miles back from the stream. The great valley highway of commerce ran up from the sea-coast by its walls, and far away into the rich lands and cities of the interior. That highway was one of the wonderful Roman roads, then even more important than are our trunk railroads at the present time. Not much attention was ever given to the city as a military post, for which it had not been intended nor was it adapted. It had rather been designed as a centre for agriculture and as a station on the stream of commerce. It was therefore secluded, a thousand feet above the level of the sea, among the mountains and highlands. With its splendid farming region around, its adjoining river and great Roman road, its beauty of situation, its salubrious climate, and its own picturesque situation, partly mountain slopes and partly intervening valleys, it had a site that for its special design was absolutely peerless.

It was environed by three concentric walls, the ruins of the inner one of which can even yet be traced. Back of it, rising up very abruptly, were mountain peaks so high that they were generally covered with snow. This snow by its meltings fed the Cogamus and other brooks, which in their perennial flow cooled and nourished the city, and enriched the surrounding plain. The city, not having been founded for military purposes, covered a considerable extent of ground, and was composed of houses low and wide apart because of the danger from earthquake-shocks.

Notwithstanding these local advantages, however, the city always continued a comparatively small one. Its dangerous location intimidated from it those who were not forced to remain by their connection with trade or by their poverty.

The one great industry which made Philadelphia a city and continued it for centuries arose from its agricultural facilities. It is probable that nearly all its inhabitants were connected directly or indirectly with farming. Either as a centre into which the produce of the fields was brought and gave employment to the various classes, or by its families living in the city and carrying on the cultivation of the land without, or living and laboring in the adjacent country, it was a city of farmers and all its activities were connected with their pursuits. There was little

else to keep its people there, where impending ruin was for ever threatening them.

The single addition to the cultivation of the ground of which any knowledge has come down to us was the industry of dyeing, which resulted from the quality of the waters of the Cogamus, so remarkable for that purpose. They still retain that distinguishing quality. The tints of the cotton dyed in Philadelphia are esteemed superior to those of any other quarter of the Levant. For this reason largely it still remains a place of considerable importance. The production of sugar was also a valuable industry as we learn from ancient writers.

But the cultivation of the vine and the manufacture of wine was that on which it chiefly relied. It was pre-eminently the wine district of the whole country, and of commerce with other countries. Everything in it and around it was connected with the wine trade. Farmers coming in from a thousand rich fields, over the plains, from the banks of the river north and south, and down the mountain slopes, with their grape-loaded vehicles were abundant evidence of what the people were doing. Inside the city, in all quarters, structures for the dye-tubs, the making of sugar, and winepresses at every corner, with the residences of the wine-merchants, were its peculiar characteristics.

The inhabitants of the place were celebrated at once for their courage and for a moral tone that was higher than that of ordinary pagan cities. It is probable that this moral character was owing in part to their simplicity of manners as an agricultural community. They were free from the corrupting influences of a luxurious and depraving city. Their constant exposure to the terrors of the earthquake-shocks may also have had a restraining and elevating influence upon them. They could hardly be indifferent, considering that a cloud was hanging over them that might burst at any instant and cut them off for ever. As to their characteristic bravery, they may in part have inherited that from their Macedonian ancestry. They were the descendants of those who had furnished the soldiers of Alexander the Great, through whom he had conquered the world. Their brave endurance, all their days, of the danger which evermore hung over them may also have developed their courage. They had been trained to face danger, and this may have made their very nature daring. They were not a people of many wars, but when the time for the boldest contest came they were ready for the most courageous deeds.

5. THE HISTORY.

Compared with all the other cities of the messages the origin of Philadelphia was of recent date. It was founded about one hundred and forty years before Christ, while the annals of the other cities go back to five or six hundred years. Moreover the city did not, like the others, rise up out of the mists of a romantic past. Its first ages were not shrouded in the uncertain haze of mythology. "Unlike its sister churches, there is no halo of mythic antiquity about its origin; no olden stories of nymphs or heroes cradled in its site invested it with sanctity, or wove a localized superstition into its civic celebrations; nor could it vie with Sardis or Pergamos in the boast of a past regal or imperial splendor."

Its founder was Attalus Philadelphus, king of Pergamos, to which Sardis and all the surrounding lands were subject. In giving to it a name, he showed himself to be one of the most generous and affectionate of men. He had come to the throne after the death of his brother Eumenes II., whom he had dearly loved. This love was with him a ruling passion, so that it was added as his special title—Attalus *Philadelphus*. How could he perpetuate its memory so well—the memory of that brotherly love—as by making it the name of the new city he was building on the Hermus? Thus would his tender affection for his brother be embalmed in the great city, and have its remembrance continued as long as even its ruins could be found. No city of earth has ever had a name more beautiful in its origin than this.

The leading events of the city's history are soon told. Its foundation was laid B. C. 140. Eight years afterward, or B. C. 132 it, with all the other cities, passed under the dominion of Rome, in which condition it continued until Rome herself fell from her world-wide sway. Under the reign of the emperor Tiberius the city came sadly into prominence through the ravages of an earthquake which either overwhelmed the greater part of its inhabitants or caused them to flee into the surrounding country. Some twenty years later its church received this message from the Son of man in heaven. The vicissitudes of thirteen centuries then passed over it, when its history burst out into a flame of matchless heroism, in connection with its fall as a Christian city and its being compelled, after a noble resistance, to come under the dominion of Islam.

To the honor of Philadelphia, that struggle must never be forgotten. In A. D. 1312 all the other cities of Asia Minor yielded

to the ferocious arms of the Moslem conquerors; but it could not be subdued. Its valiant citizens defended their religion and their freedom for fourscore years after all the rest had submitted. Their faith and their courage could not be overcome even by the merciless forces of the Mohammedans. For those eighty years they bravely held out, even though they had to suffer and fight alone. It was not until A. D. 1392, that forced by famine, they capitulated, on honorable terms, to Bajazet, the proudest of all the Ottomans. The history of its fall forms one of the saddest and most cruel pages in the annals of time. The city was completely isolated, and its distance from the sea forbade all hope of succor. Still the garrison scorned the summons to surrender, relying on a tradition that the Christian city of Philadelphia should never fall into the hands of the infidel. At first Bajazet forbade his soldiers to plunder the district, and ordered that private property should be respected; but finding the resistance to be more stubborn than he had expected, he determined to drive them to desperation by utterly ravaging the whole surrounding country. After some months the garrison was reduced to extremity, and capitulated on terms of complete submission, saving only their lives and their *religion*. But the saddest part of the story of the last extinction of Christian independence is that, to the eternal infamy of the Greeks, the deposed emperor, John, with his son Manuel (both Christians), in resentment against the emperor Andronicus, led his troops to assist in the siege, and that Manuel and his soldiers were the first to force the breach which compelled the surrender of the town. It fell, but in its fall it earned the fame of having been the last Christian city taken by the Turks.

It then lost the name of a Christian city; but it lived on under the rule of the Mohammedans, and has so continued for six hundred years, with now six mosques and about twenty-five Christian churches, five of them of some importance, but the others old and disused.

### 6. JEWISH COLONY.

Because of its influence upon the character of the message we must here describe another peculiarity of this city. There was resident in it a large Jewish community or colony. They claimed to be a synagogue—*the* synagogue of the true Hebrews; but the Son of man, in his communication to its church, styles them the *synagogue of Satan*.

The pursuits of trade had led many Jews to settle in Asia

Minor. When the Jews were banished from Rome by an edict of the emperor Claudius, they are known to have taken refuge, in large companies, in such distant places as Philadelphia. Probably many of them were there from that cause at the time of the messages. They were doubtless Hellenistic Jews, and had very little more of religion than the name. They must have been numerous in proportion to the whole population and have had a marked influence upon the affairs of the city, to awaken so much attention as they here received. If, as it is believed, the wine and dye trades were mainly in their hands, we can easily see how the patronage they would wield and the wealth they would possess would clothe them with a power and influence even out of proportion to their numerical strength.

Their opposition to the Christians may not have been in the form of positive persecution. It is more likely that in this case they would attempt to accomplish their end through proselyting. As an association these Hellenistic Jews assumed that they were the true people and the true church of God. They claimed that they were the real Israel—the real synagogue in Philadelphia. In divine irony, the Lord granted that they were a synagogue—but a synagogue of Satan. They asserted that they were the genuine covenant people, and as such they reviled those who professed the name of Jesus of Nazareth. This we infer from the words of the message: they "shall know that I have loved *thee*." They had looked down with despite upon the Christians, as we again see from the promise: "I will make them to come and worship before thee."

It is manifest that they must have been very bitter in their hatred and malignant in their opposition. Their attacks moreover, were in the form of seductions of the Christians from their faith. Without a doubt the trial of the faith of the church of Philadelphia was chiefly from this source. In this lay the great contest to which the church was called. To overcome this bitter, persevering, seducing opposition from the most influential inhabitants of the city would be their crowning victory.

### 7. DEITY OF THE CITY.

In order to understand the surroundings of the people of this church, the influences bearing on their character, and especially the struggles which their religion cost them, we must have at least some knowledge of the tutelary deity of the city, and of the worship with which they were coming into daily contact. In

Philadelphia there was a small Christian church and a large and influential Jewish synagogue; but the great mass of the people were pagans, and their worship was pure idolatry. They were all idolaters, and consequently ignorant of the nature, history, and spirit of Christianity, and were degraded to the level of the false deity before whom they bowed in adoration; and we can well conceive of the bitter struggles of the Christians of the city, in their daily life having communication with such neighbors.

Ephesus had its Diana, Smyrna its apotheosized Homer, Pergamos its Æsculapius, Thyatira its Apollo, Sardis its Cybele, Laodicea its Jupiter, and this city its *Bacchus*—the god of wine and drinking. His current descriptions in mythic form were grotesque but eminently characteristic. "As he was the god of the vintage, of wine, and of drinkers, he is generally represented crowned with vine and ivy leaves, with a thyrsus in his hand. His figure is that of an effeminate young man, to denote the joy which generally prevails at feasts; and sometimes that of an old man, to teach that wine taken immoderately will enervate us, and consume our health, render us loquacious and childish like old men, and unable to keep secrets." In his exploits it is related that "He marched at the head of an army composed of women as well as men, all inspired with divine fury, and armed with thyrsi, cymbals, and other musical instruments. The leader was drawn in a chariot by a lion and a tiger, and was accompanied by Pan and Silenus, and all the satyrs."

That Bacchus was the special deity of Philadelphia, and that the city was the centre of his worship for the whole country, was the undoubted fact. So declared tradition, so recorded history, and so sang some of the ancient poets. Virgil tells of the vine-clad volcanic hills around Philadelphia, and of the god of wine who had the seat of his worship there. More unmistakably still is this indicated by the fact that its coins are stamped with the head of Bacchus or with the figure of a female bacchanal. In this general tradition, history, poetry, nature, and monuments all agree. The city was identified with the very idea of wine and festivity.

There was an obvious fitness in this. Philadelphia, with its volcanic hills, was the centre of the vine region of Asia; where could the wine-god be so fitly enthroned as there? It was the wine-market of the world; where so appropriately could the crown of drinking be worn? How many points brought out in the message are in this way wrought into each other! Here

were the volcanoes that prepared the very soil for the culture of the vine; here were the trading Jews attracted by the wine-market, and here was the wine-god of heathen mythology.

We must glance at the influence of this Bacchus-worship upon the life of the city, and the obstacles it placed in the way of the gospel. We must remember that to many devoutly inclined not merely was Bacchus the jolly god of the vineyards, but also the divine arbiter of their fate. His temple would therefore be the sacred shrine and the glory of their city. It would be adorned with the masterpieces of art, and the place of daily resort for their devotions—an important element of the city's life, giving a peculiar aspect to its business and activities.

Then, how corrupting must have been the worship of the drinking god! Some would engage in it with feelings not of devotion, but of superstition; some from the demands of their duties in the temple; but the great mass out of pure levity. According to the testimony of ancient writers, there were generally connected with it debauches that were most infamous. Especially were there, at the great annual festivals, such revels as were peculiarly odious.

What a degrading moral influence must such a worship, so called, have upon the people, and what a barrier in the way of the gospel! It might not have been so corrupting as the inexpressible lewdness, or the satanic debaucheries, of some of the other cities, still it must have had its own peculiar elements of hostility to Christianity. The trials of the Christians arising from it must have been very severe. The bigotry of the Jews, the jealousy of the priests of the temple, and the superstition of the mass of the people must all have been bad enough; but here also was the gilded attraction of sense in the wine-cup. We can well conceive of the dangerous hostility of its scenes of revelry to the best interest of religion in the soul and in the community. The attractions of sense will destroy souls where positive persecution would do but little harm. The fascination of the wine, and the hilarity in the very temple of their god must have been blasting in their influence. The great struggle from this cause was one serious ingredient in the "overcometh" of this message to the church of Philadelphia.

### 8. ORIGIN AND STATE OF THE CHURCH.

Of definite information concerning the planting and first movements of the Philadelphia church we have absolutely none. No

doubt it sprang up with the general propagation of the gospel throughout the land. But naturally we desire to know more concerning the early days and the first impress on this congregation so dearly beloved of her Lord. In the absence of positive information we must throw ourselves on conjectures and probabilities. But such presumptions may very properly be indulged, not only without rashness, but even without much danger of mistake. We can adopt with considerable satisfaction what would naturally be the results of facts known with certainty.

There are at least four sources to which, with very considerable certainty, we can trace the beginnings of this church: the movements that were awakened on the day of Pentecost; the missionary labors of the three apostolic evangelists, Paul, John and Timothy; the impulses given by travelers up the Hermus and over the great high-road into the interior; and the work of converted Jewish merchants who had come to settle in that city.

That the very first impulses had their origin in the wonders of the day of Pentecost there can scarcely be any question. The great Pentecostal revival at Jerusalem occurred sixty-three years before the time when the messages to the churches were sent down from heaven. Threescore and three years would be ample time for even a strong church to grow up. In the account given in the Acts of the Apostles of that first great outpouring of the Spirit, of the fourteen cities from which witnesses had been providentially sent to Jerusalem to behold and then to bear testimony of the wonders of that day, no less than five were in Asia Minor. Those providentially chosen witnesses were devout Jews or proselytes. Some of them must have been from Philadelphia. And some of those devout Philadelphians must have been among the three thousand converted on that glorious day of visitation. When those young converts returned home they must have related to their friends and neighbors what they had seen and heard, and the blessed change they had experienced. They would rehearse this with all the ardor of first love; and some hearers would heed, believe, and be converted. A nucleus for a church would thus be prepared, and their impelling zeal for their new-found Saviour would inevitably force them to form themselves into a branch of the Church of Jesus Christ.

The church thus commenced through the impulses of Pentecost would undoubtedly be afterwards increased and strengthened by the Spirit-guided labors of apostles who were led of God into that special field. Chief of these undoubtedly was the great

Apostle of the Gentiles. His labors are spoken of; and in connection with them is the record: "So that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks." We may easily picture to ourselves one of his missionary trips through the country, such as they must all have been. From the stirring scenes of Ephesus, up along the coast of the Ægean he goes as far as to Smyrna; then on along the course of the Hermus to the old inland town of Menimen; still along the same stream until he reaches Magnesia; then far upward toward the north he bends his steps to Pergamos; eastward again he turns and soon reaches Thyatira; down again into the valley of the Hermus he pursues his course until the gates of Sardis open before him; then assuredly he would not pause until, only five-and-twenty miles farther up the river, he had visited Philadelphia. It is nearly certain that he would take just such a course as this. And what a joy his coming would be! What a new impulse it would give to the little band of the faithful there! How deep and ardent the piety he would be the instrument of inspiring! What new zeal would he arouse even amid the great trials and discouragements they were encountering!

The beloved disciple, John, had also been there. The last years of his long and blessed life, we know, were spent in Ephesus, which was only about seventy-five miles from Philadelphia. We can fancy him as, weary and weakened by age, he leaves, for a period of refreshment, the heated city on the coast, and finds his way up to the cooling mountain region of Philadelphia. And being near to it, he would not fail of visiting the city of the brothers' love. Its church must have lain very near to his affectionate heart. He certainly would not be idle while there, even though very feeble. He would not lose the opportunity of strengthening that people by telling them of that dear Lord upon whose bosom he leaned with such unearthly tenderness.

There, too, undoubtedly had been heard the earnest voice of the youthful evangelist Timothy. We know that he resided at Ephesus for some length of time; and that Paul, his spiritual father, had delegated him to take the oversight of the infant church while he himself lay a prisoner at Rome, and felt the oncoming of the infirmities of age. We can hardly conceive of his being so long in the region of this church of Philadelphia, so much beloved, without occasionally visiting it and helping to build it up in the faith. He was there only thirty years before

this charge from the Son of man in heaven came down to it, and his ministry must have helped to make it so worthy of the divine applause. He may not have founded the church, yet there is scarcely a question but that he helped to build it up.

Another agency in founding it is evident. As in nature the birds of the air carry the seeds of trees and plants, and unwittingly deposit them in new soils where they soon germinate and spring up into beautiful verdure, so would the boatmen on the Hermus and merchants over the great thoroughfare up into the Olympic range of mountains carry the seeds of divine truth and plant them in many a town and hamlet through the country. Coming up from Ephesus and Smyrna, they would spread the news at every stage of their journey. On the decks of their vessels at the twilight hours, and in the roadside stopping-places where they lodged at nights, they would talk of the wonders that were occurring in the great cities from which they had come. Some of them, with joy which they could not conceal, would describe the glorious change they themselves had experienced. Without a doubt, as elsewhere, these tidings would be circulated in Philadelphia. Thus new impulses would be given, believers would be strengthened in their faith, and the church would be enlightened, enlarged and edified.

The church must also have received considerable strength from the Jewish settlers who were continually arriving to take up their abode in this great city. Some of them would be attracted there to make a living through trade. Some would be true converts found among the fugitives who had been banished from Rome by the edict of the emperor. Not all the Jews of the city were associated with the synagogue of Satan. Without doubt many of those dealers in wines, dyes, and sugar were sincere followers of the Lord Jesus. They had come to the city with the treasures of earthly merchandise, but they also bore with them the pearl of great price.

From all these causes there had grown up in Philadelphia a church of great importance. It was not a large church, but it was loyal to its Lord. Evidently it had a history and a standing that were looked upon with special regard. It had not been contaminated with paganism as had been the others of the seven. The struggles through which it had to pass were not so much from heathen persecutors as from Jewish seducers. Most likely the tone of its piety had been greatly improved by the influence of the horrors of the earthquakes from which it had but recently

suffered. The simple-hearted, honest, and steadfast spirit of its farming population had stamped upon it a peculiarly stable character.

### 9. NAME OF THE SON OF MAN.

The title given to the enthroned Christ in this message is very significant. As elsewhere, the name here is indicative of his nature and functions in their aspects toward this church. That nature of Christ is here revealed in its three component elements, so far as the peculiarities of the church required: "He that is holy, he that is true;" "He that hath the key of David;" "He that openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth." They must be understood in their aspect toward God's people in Philadelphia. They must be studied in their bearing upon the two great trials of that church—namely, its temptations from the synagogue of the Jews, and through its perpetual danger from the earthquakes. First, in view of the Jewish opposition, he was the real Messiah of Israel; second, in reference to both their trials, he had the keys, the authority of David; third, as to the impending dangers, he could and would use his sovereign power for the protection and deliverance of his faithful people. Drawn out into fuller analysis, in view of both enemies and dangers, his titles engage that—(1) He was the predicted Messiah of the Scriptures; (2) He was the holy, the consecrated deliverer of Israel; (3) He was the true (real) Jehovah; (4) He was clothed with sovereign authority over all, denoted by having the keys; (5) He was then reigning over them, on David's typical throne; and (6) He would certainly use his supreme authority for the protection of his people of Philadelphia.

To understand the significance of these titles in this connection, we must glance at the opposition of the Jewish synagogue—for they were all adapted to meet that. The great point of attack upon the Christians undoubtedly was concerning their Messiah. That blessed Name they would revile, blaspheme, and misrepresent, in order, if possible, to crush the church of his followers. It will be found, upon investigation, that this mode of attack lies at the root of all the errors and oppositions that ever have sprung up against the cause of God. The aim has always been to take the crown from the brow of Jesus. These enemies in the synagogue would try to prove that he was not the Messiah of prophecy, had no claim upon the keys of authority, no right to their allegiance, no power over them. He had sprung from the

disreputable Nazareth, was a mere peasant, had been condemned as an impostor by the constituted authorities of Jerusalem, and had been ignominiously crucified as a felon. These Christians of Philadelphia were fools for following such a contemptible leader. He had been dead for half a century; what madness to claim that he was the Messiah! Messiah was yet to come, and they were the true synagogue, looking and praying for his appearance. Such sneers, revilings, and curses would they pour upon the humble Christians with ceaseless hatred.

But what was that Messiah's own testimony sent down from his mediatorial throne to those faithful ones who were so patiently enduring all for his name? At once he assumes the title most sublime of all, and hallowed through centuries on the pages of their Sacred Book. In the strains of the royal poet it was: "Neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." In the sublime visions of the priestly prophet: "And the heathen shall know that I am the Lord, the Holy One in Israel." In the raptures of the evangelical Isaiah, three times over in a single chapter is the sublime title, "the Holy One of Israel." Such were the utterances of Scripture, well known and hallowed in the minds of all devout Israelites. The Holy One was proclaimed and magnified on all the sacred pages. He, and he alone, was the hope and glory of the nation.

And this is his sublime title that now comes down from the throne to the humble church of Philadelphia. The Jews might sneer at it, but it would be rapture to the souls of the faithful. The Jesus Christ whom they adored and followed might be blasphemed and rejected by the synagogue of Satan, but nevertheless, simply and plainly he was the Holy One, the True One, and the glorious Messiah of the Church. The Holy One—consecrated, set apart, anointed as the Saviour of the true Israel. To him they were looking; he was their Head, and him did they follow in spite of every enemy.

He was the True, not only the truth in itself, but the true, the veritable God of Israel. In spite of the pretensions and misrepresentations of the synagogue, he was the real and the very God of gods. He was, notwithstanding all Jewish glosses, the real Jehovah portrayed by all the hallowed types of Scripture. He was the only true God, in opposition to all pagan deities. He was the realization of all the divine names in Scripture—the Father, the Life, the Bread, the Everlasting, the Omnipotent, the Supreme.

He, Jesus, the object of the worship of this people, was the fulfillment of that type so wondrously sublime: he had "the key of David." To the Jews there was no title of their Messiah so glorious as this. "The house of David" was the consecrated expression for the typical kingdom of David, the kingdom of Messiah, the established type of the Church of God. David was its representative king, the great type of its heavenly Sovereign. Here it was asserted that Jesus Christ of the Philadelphia church was his true successor, his real antitype. He was the legitimate head of Zion. As, therefore, the true King of the true Israel, he would undertake for, maintain, and for ever defend his people against every foe.

He further claims that the kingly authority represented by David was in reality his—he had "the key of David." His was that absolute sovereignty of which on a memorable occasion he declared, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." This power and authority were in the hands of their Jesus as part of his mediatorial office; and he would use them for the upbuilding, the defense, and the glory of his church—even the church of Philadelphia. In all that he would do there would be a final decision from which there would be no appeal.

The keys of the kingdom so put into his hand, he would use as a sovereign; for his title has in it this element: "He that openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth." He, and he alone, decides, first by his Word and Spirit in the Church, and then by his authority in the world, the question as to who belong to the people of God. In the words of the old commentator, Scott, who is always wise and devout: "Being the promised Son of David according to the flesh, and the King of the true Israel to all generations, he hath the absolute power to open the gate of mercy to whom he pleaseth; to open the kingdom of heaven to the souls of his people, when removed by death; and to open their graves, and bring forth their bodies glorious and immortal, that they may be reunited to their souls in everlasting felicity; and, on the other hand, to shut out and exclude from mercy, and from heaven, whom he will, and to shut them up in hell; nor can any resistance be made to his power, or any appeal from his decision."

### 10. CENTRAL POINT.

"Behold, I have set before thee an open door," is the burden of this message, and the centre around which every point in it

may be arranged. Concerning its special significance there has been diversity of views. One of the most common opinions concerning it is that the Lord here promised the faithful church of Philadelphia an open door of opportunity for helping forward the cause of Christ. But except the ordinary use of that phraseology, we cannot see one good reason for the adoption of such a theory. There is nothing in the message that would specially harmonize with such a view. Take it all as one, or take any particular element of it, there is nothing of special significance in that a door of opportunity should constitute the great characteristic of this church.

If however, on the contrary, we take the significance to be that to the church of Philadelphia, weak, small, helpless and sorely beset with trials, but yet faithful to her Lord, there is here the promise of an open door of escape from her trials and dangers, then all becomes natural and emblematic. We then see how this becomes consequentially connected with the foregoing title of the Son of man—"He that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth." Such is his prerogative, and in its exercise he opens a door of escape from all her enemies to the church of Philadelphia. The leading characteristic of the condition of this church was her exposedness to danger from two causes, one natural and one moral—the earthquake and the synagogue. Of these two dangers, the one was a type of the other, and the same language is used in reference to both. To deliver the people from both was provision made by him who had the keys of David. This was the one great object, the central point of the whole message.

He set before the people of this church an open door of escape from the terrors of the earthquake. This we consider the leading point in this peculiar promise. It was made in view of the awful calamity that was evermore hanging over the place. Even at the present day, houses there are built with doors that can readily be thrown open for escape when the dreaded shocks begin to give the alarm. The whole aspect of the message would indicate that this was in contemplation, and that the faithful would have some special way of escape opened to them while others would be swallowed up in the ruins. Providence would present some plan of safety for them, which others would not see, or, seeing, would not regard. Would it be that on the very first symptom of the approaching crash, heeding the warning words,

"Behold, I come quickly!" the Christians would flee to the open country, while others, mocking their credulity, would linger and perish?

Most certainly there was also a promise of a way of escape from the other, the great spiritual danger from the synagogue of Satan. The persistency, the bitterness, and the formidable strength of the Jewish opposition would make the danger to their souls certainly as great as the other to their bodies. Considering the possibility of their being over-persuaded; the force of the example and the influence of the wealthy Jewish merchants, on whom some of them may have been dependent for their living; the liability of the young to be led away; and the fact that the Christians were but few in number and weak in spirituality, they would not be able to stand fast without aid from above. To the more devout and considerate of the faithful there must have appeared appalling danger that the very life of the church would be gradually worn out. How cheering, then, must have been the engagement of their Lord that some way of escape, some open door would be provided, some door to them imagined and to be taken on simple faith, and to us explained only in part through the conversion of their ēnemies according to promise!

An element in this special engagement must also have had reference to some remarkable preservation of that church from the pagan persecutions of that day. There is no record of any such persecution as having afflicted the church of Philadelphia. And yet that people could hardly have been exempt from the atrocities which were raging all around them, especially as the great mass of the population of the city were heathens. Was it not because of some providentially opened door of escape that we hear nothing of their suffering in this way? Was it that the church was so small and insignificant in their esteem that the remorseless enemies of the faith were providentially led to overlook it? Was there some special interposition of their Lord on its behalf? Did God, in whose hands are the hearts of all men, by his providence send them some kindly disposed Roman governor who interposed for their safety? We can only conjecture; but, from the promise on the one hand and the ascertained facts on the other, we cannot be far wrong in our conjectures.

It may be added as more than probable that this promise of an open door had also reference to some unrecorded calamity that was soon to come on the city and country. This we infer from the allusion to some dread event: "Behold, I come quickly!" Was

it assurance granted to the beloved people of that little church that He who had the keys of David would open a way of escape for them during the diabolic persecution under the emperor Domitian? That persecution was raging about the time of these messages; and at that time thousands of the unoffending followers of Christ all over the empire were slaughtered amid relentless cruelties. Did God here promise to shield his own people of Philadelphia from the deadly tempest that was sweeping over all the rest of the world? This special protection by her glorious Lord was probably to be a characteristic of that church throughout all her future history. There was certainly a striking instance of it, centuries afterward, when, as Islam was throwing a pall over mankind, God helped this city to stand out for almost a century after all the others had succumbed. Is it not probable, moreover, that there is yet some remarkable deliverance in store for his people, as the day of earth's entire redemption draws nigh?

We are now prepared to estimate fully how each separate element of the message rises, directly or indirectly, out of the one central point which was the burden, the core, of this special communication from the throne. Each one of them is in some way connected with: "Behold, I have set before thee an open door." We have the synagogue of Satan as that from which the open door was needed; the title, "He that hath the key of David," as that by which the door was opened; the "little strength" as that to which the deliverance from heaven was granted; the humiliated Jews as those from whom the faithful would be aided in escaping; the "pillar in the temple," the "go no more out;" the "new name" on the brow; and the "crown"—all engaged as the reward to all those who would be graciously delivered.

It must not be overlooked here that this church of comparative weakness and helplessness was the one of the seven to which such glorious deliverance was promised. It was the church of but little strength which would escape the greatest dangers. Consciously weak herself, she was the fittest for God's power to rest on her, that Christ, the King, might have all the glory. It was a sublime illustration of the divine principle announced through the apostle: "My strength is made perfect in weakness."

### 11. APPROBATION.

It would almost seem as if our Lord's heart of love were laid open to speak all the words that were possible to encourage each of the seven churches. Before rebuke, or promise, or counsel, he

would cheer them by expressing approbation of whatever good could be found in them. Especially was it so with this church of Philadelphia. Three times over does the Lord of the church utter his approval: "I know thy works"—works of fidelity and courage; "Thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name;" "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience."

"I know thy works." He was carefully looking down from the throne upon their feeblest efforts. He was with them through all they did or suffered in his cause. All the good they did was a joy to him. It would seem that as a tender parent over a weakly child, so did he yearn over them with peculiar affection. In number and in means of usefulness they were inferior to the other churches, but they were under his peculiar regard. Not the greatness of opportunity, or amount of results, is that which God regards, but the faithful effort. Wondrously encouraging was this to that church, as it is to every humble follower of Christ.

How comforting to them must have been the commendation: "Thou hast a little strength!" A little strength—how characteristic of this particular church, in the midst of a farming community, and made up from the humbler classes! It was a church which doubtless had but few members, and was greatly straitened in its means of doing good. It was a little church in the eyes of men, compared with the large communities of Ephesus or the wealthy congregation of Laodicea. The people were poor and without influence in comparison with the rich merchants of Smyrna, or the multitudes of the pagan inhabitants of their own city. Yet, poor and weak and few as they were, their Lord praised them that they had any strength whatever remaining after all the opposition they had met with from the synagogue of Satan. They had but little strength, and yet they had stood unshaken amid most formidable enemies. That little strength of theirs, the glorious Master would make effectual to the subduing and conversion of some of the very opponents who had so bitterly assailed them. How appropriate, how comprehensive, how comforting, was his every word to this humble people who needed his help so much!

Descending from words of general approbation the heavenly King makes special mention of some of the chief elements of their fidelity. Of these, the first is, "Thou hast kept the word of my patience." "The word of my patience" is an expression

somewhat peculiar, and needs to be distinctly understood in order that the force of this commendation may be seen. "My patience"—the patience which I impart, my peculiar patience, my patience in contradistinction from that ordinarily seen in the world, the special patience which I enjoin, the patience which was exemplified in me, the patience which is characteristic of my cause, the patience which the exigencies of that cause require. That was the special thing required of this church, and which had been constituted the peculiar test of its fidelity. In all times and places there is some special truth which is the trying, suffering truth; and this was theirs. Their great commendation was that they had stood that test. They had proved faithful by their loyalty to the word of their Lord's patience—"kept the word of his patience." They had kept it while so many others had proved recreant; while so much had been done to seduce them from it; while it brought down upon them the sorest persecution, and while his own blessed example had been needed to outweigh with them all the inducements which the world could bring. They kept it because he had so commanded; because their faith in him assured them that it was true; and because their love to him was so intense and enduring. To do so must have put their patience to its utmost tension; and this was so pleasing in his sight that he puts it down to their everlasting remembrance.

The final commendation of this church, and that which is the climax of all is that they had "not denied his name." This may have been on some special occasion, not on record, when their faith and fortitude had been very sorely tried. At any rate, they had, without a doubt, acknowledged his name when that name was held in contempt, when they would lose all by it, and when apparently there would be no recompense. They had made that name their boast, their rallying-point, their glory.

The Jews, with their utmost effort, had striven to convince them that Jesus was not the promised Messiah; but they could not be persuaded to yield to that seduction. Others had done so, but they would not deny that name which was to them above all other names. They stood loyal even when every tempest of opposition beat hard against them. To that name which they loved so dearly they would not be recreant. Ever would they witness for him, even if the sword were hanging over their heads. For that name they had endured persecution, as they were still ready to do. Their loyalty to it caused them to be ridiculed,

defamed, put under ban, belied and hated; still would they not be apostate to their Lord.

The risen Lord beheld all this from his throne, and his heart went out towards them. He saw, and he never would forget their steadfastness. They thought they were alone; but his eye was bent lovingly upon them. He would remember it to their credit for evermore, and ten thousand benefits would come down upon them from his hands.

### 12. PROMISES TO THAT CHURCH.

In most impressive consistency with the character of this church as exposed in all the rest of the message, there is neither rebuke nor threat to be found against it. In this there is a variation from the plan of all the other messages. All is commendation and promise to this humble, trusting people; and, in conformity with the general scheme of the messages, there are two classes of promises here—one local to this special people, and one general to the whole Church of God. In the local engagement which is made to this church specifically there are three distinct items: that the enemies of the church would soon be brought to see and acknowledge that the Holy and the True One was verily with his people there; that those very enemies would be so perfectly subdued as to come cringing on their knees before the faithful followers of Jesus; and that the true Christians there would be kept safe from some dreadful calamities that would soon sweep over the world.

As to the first of these, "*Behold I will make them to know that I have loved thee*," the meaning is very obvious. The small but loyal band composing this church had been reviled and ridiculed and persecuted for their faith in Jesus as the Messiah, but they had stood firm. The time was now at hand when God in his wonder-working providence would interpose and prove to that synagogue of Satan that these were his own true people, and that they were right in their faith. In some way he would make the truth clear to all men. By some marvelous deliverance of his people, some extraordinary manifestation of his favor, he would make even the persecuting world to see that his omnipotence was on the side of the few faithful ones of this church. At once would he overwhelm the enemies of the Cross in consternation while those who had stood firmly for him and his cause would be filled with surprise and rapture.

The next promise to the little but loyal church is more won-

derful still: "*Behold, I will made them to come and worship before thy feet.*" Evidently there is reference here to some momentous events in their near history from that time which are not recorded. What in all probability were they? Did they refer to some great religious awakening in that city by which some of the worst Jewish enemies would be brought to the obedience of faith? Such a supposition will at any rate explain most of the language that is used. The consistent and holy lives of the Christians must have made an impression even upon their worst enemies. The sight of their patience under cruel wrongs, applied by the Holy Ghost and rendered more effective by terrific judgments, would bring even some of the synagogue of Satan, who had been so active and bitter in their opposition, to a saving knowledge of the truth. Many would be terrified and convinced. Then would these awakened souls, seeing clearly that the divine favor was with the Christians, come humbly and put themselves under their wings for safety. There would thus be a marvelous fulfillment of the prediction in Isaiah: "And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers; they shall bow down to thee with their faces to the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me." Still more to the exact promise of the text is the assurance: "I will make the place of thy feet glorious. The sons also of them that afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee; and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet; and they shall call thee the city of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel." This latter prediction was singularly fulfilled in this message: "The city of the Lord"—called even to this day, "*The City of God;*" "the Zion of the Holy One of Israel"—the title of the Son of God in this connection, "*He that is Holy.*"

Appalling events, of which we have no record, would, most likely, awaken such terror in the hostile Jews that from their bitter enmity they would be turned into the most abject suppliants. They could not but see that the God of Israel was with the Christians; and for protection they would fly to them and even fall down before their feet and worship them. Such an astounding change would be wrought that these supercilious and bitter persecutors who had branded the followers of Christ with every opprobrious epithet would hasten to take the very lowest place in the dust at their feet. This was a marvelous alteration which must have come in the condition of the church of Phila-

delphia; but it is only a specimen of what prophecy warrants us in expecting will be witnessed all the world over.

More deeply earnest and direct still becomes the promise to this church: "*Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.*" What was this hour of temptation, or trial, to be? Was it to be some terrific shock of the earthquake that was evermore impending in those lands? Probably this was at least one of its fearful ingredients. Indeed it is more than probable that, soon after the time of this message, one of these indescribable horrors did befall that region. It is almost certain that such was the case, for Tacitus, who lived at the time, describes one then, asserting that it sank twelve cities of Asia Minor in one night, and that, among the rest, Philadelphia was badly shattered. Eusebius also, the ecclesiastical historian, mentions this earthquake, saying that city after city was shattered to the dust by it, and even names Ephesus, Magnesia, Sardis, Philadelphia, Tmolus, and other places as being the chief sufferers. While such devastation was wrought in their own city and elsewhere, it is probable that the believers of Philadelphia were saved. There is scarcely a doubt but that this would be the case in pursuance of the special privilege: "Behold, I have set before thee an open door!" Were they not saved because they relied on the divine warning, and fled out into the open country, and so escaped from being crushed by the crumbling walls as others were?

Perhaps another ingredient of the terrible hour of visitation arose from the furious persecutions which raged over the empire soon after these warning words were heard. Certainly two out of the ten general persecutions of the early Christians did their bloody work then or soon afterwards. The cruel one of the emperor Domitian was at its worst a few months afterwards, and that of Trajan in A. D. 106, only ten years later. Jews and Christians were probably alike involved in these nefarious massacres; but God in some way interposed to cover the heads of his people in Philadelphia. Most likely some humane proconsul, like Pliny of Bithynia, impressed with what he witnessed of the innocency of the Christian's lives, may have sheltered them from the storm. Again were the faithful saved while multitudes of the Jews were no doubt slaughtered.

The sum of all is that the probable explanation of the warning, "the hour of temptation," is that it referred not to the

earthquake alone, nor to the persecutions alone, but to both these and other horrors in a season of most terrible general calamities which soon after this afflicted the whole Roman world. That there was such a combination of general woes about the beginning of the second century is well known to the historian. Canon Farrar, who devoted twelve years to the study of the history of those days, gives a not exaggerated picture of the times, presenting such authorities as Tacitus, Suetonius and Eusebius. This testimony is well worthy of being carefully studied and remembered. The language of this brilliant writer is: "Horrible was the aspect of the world at that time" (soon after these messages were sent); "men seemed to be tormented and terrified with catastrophies and portents. 'Besides the manifold changes and chances of human affairs,' says Tacitus, 'there were prodigies in heaven and on earth, the warrings of lightnings, and the presages of the future, now joyous, now gloomy; now obscure, now unmistakable. For never was it rendered certain by clearer indications, or by more deadly massacres of the Roman people, that the gods care nothing for our happiness.' In Rome a pestilence had carried off tens of thousands of the citizens. A disastrous inundation of the Tiber had impeded the march of Otho's troops and encumbered the roads with ruins. In Lydia an encroachment of the sea had wrought fearful havoc. In Asia, city after city had been shattered to the dust by earthquakes. 'The world itself is being shaken to pieces,' says Seneca, 'and there is universal consternation.' Comets, eclipses, meteors, parhelions, terrified the ignorant, and were themselves the pretexts for imperial cruelties. Auroras tinged the sky with blood. Volcanoes seemed, like Vesuvius, to be waking to new fury.

"Morally, the state of the pagan world was fearful. It was sunk so low that, in the opinion of the pagan moralists of the empire, posterity could but imitate and could not surpass such a virulence of degradation. The Romish world and the Jewish world were alike rent by civil war. There were banquets in the reign of Nero at which seven emperors, entirely unrelated to each other, might have met under the same roof; and *six of these died violent deaths.* Every general of the smallest eminence became ambitious to rise to the emperor's throne. 'More than once the soldiers had serious thoughts of murdering all the senators in order to keep the whole government of the world in their own hands.' In some of the civil wars it is related that the 'very roads were obstructed with the mounds of the dead.' After a des-

perate hand-to-hand conflict between Romans and Romans which heaped the fields with the almost incredible number of the slain, the soldiers fell sobbing into one another's arms, at the wickedness of civil war. Amid portents so threatening and scenes so terrible, it is not strange that the hearts of men should be failing them from fear. There had been for many years an all but universal impression that the days of Rome were numbered."

If such was the predicted hour of temptation, the season of overwhelming calamities, we can see the riches of God's promise that he would cover his faithful church of Philadelphia from them. Such awful events would fill both Jews and pagans with consternation, would humble the proud opposers of the omnipotent Messiah, would close the mouth of every enemy of Christ and his cause, and would produce scenes of crouching, groveling fear before the friends of the Almighty Lord, as these inspired words depict.

And the time of trial was then at hand. The very solemn warning is added: "Behold, I come quickly!" The predicted scenes of horror were real, they were urgent, they were at the door. The patience of the faithful Christians would not be tried much longer; the worst fears of the enemies would be realized before they were aware. Before the warning words were well heard, the hour of trial would be upon them. "Behold, I come quickly!"—this is the established formula for the surprisingness of God's coming to vindicate his cause. The words depict the consternation of his coming—so unexpected, so sudden, so terribly early and so terribly great.

According to the divine engagement with this church, when this time of dire calamities would come, pagans, Jews, Christians —the whole world would be exposed. But when the crisis was actually upon them there would be a distinction—for the Christians would in some way be sheltered: "*I will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world*" is the promise made them. Their faith and patience were still further tried, in that the manner of their deliverance is not foretold, though the fact of it is made certain. The language is very positive: "I will keep thee"—and that, while all the rest would be left to suffer. As to them the doom is fearfully comprehensive —"all the world," "them that dwell upon the earth." It would be a visitation upon all the world in antithesis to believers. All mankind but the elect, is phraseology of our Lord himself. At any rate the humble church of Philadelphia would in some way be covered from the storm. In some marvelous way which is

not recorded they would be kept outside of the terrible calamities. They would be so perfectly safe as not to be even in the vortex of the woes. Quite significant is the language of the promise: "I will keep thee"—not *in*, but "*out of* the hour of temptation."

Thus would it come to pass that this church of little strength, but of much patience, would see the wisdom of their steadfast adherence to their Messiah. The world might think them foolish for risking so much on a mere promise. Sometimes they may themselves have had sad misgivings as to the result. They had to go in the dark so far as human calculations were concerned. They could do nothing but lean hard on the promise, and obey. But when the awful hour would come, and they would behold so many crushed amid untold woes, and themselves unharmed, then would they experience the very rapture of the divine deliverance. They had loved and trusted in the dark: what would it be now, when all was light, and joy, and victory?

### 13. COUNSEL.

It is very remarkable indeed how every point in this message ranges itself around the one central thought or manifest divine purpose for which it was sent. The leading communication to it was that, inasmuch as the church had patiently resisted all the efforts of its enemies to seduce it from its faith, its Lord would very soon open for it a way of triumphant escape from all its dangers. This explains why all the advice given to it was simply that it should continue on firmly in the course it was already pursuing. There was not a word of reproach against it, and consequently there was no advice needed but that it should still maintain its integrity. The words of counsel and comfort addressed to it were few and plain: "Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." These words imply that that church had already a crown of honor; that there were certain bitter enemies striving to take that crown from them; that their greatest concern must be to avert such disaster by most strenuously resisting; and that their great encouragement was that their Lord would very soon come for their deliverance.

By comparing the crown promised to the church of Smyrna with that named here, it will be perceived that this is not a crown first to be received in heaven, but one of which the patient Philadelphia believers were already possessed. There it is, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life;"

here it is, "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." There it was future; here it was already in possession. These humble Christians had their crown even then. Their steadfastness to Christ and his cause was that which imparted to them beauty, dignity, and finish—the very essence of crowning glory. They had kept the word of their Lord's patience, and this was their crown. Their risen Messiah esteemed their fidelity so highly that to their honor he gave it this lofty title. It was their crown in his eyes, and hence it was such in reality. This was the glory of the Philadelphia Christians as distinguished from that of all others. The patience and zeal, the truth and piety which they already possessed were that which constituted their highest honor. Moreover, this crown of honor which they already wore would ultimately in eternity pass over into their crown of glory for evermore.

But there were certain bitter enemies to them and to their crown. The language of the message intimates this: "Let no man take thy crown." The tenor of the message reveals who these enemies were. They were the synagogue of Satan—Jewish tempters who would deprive them of that which was their truest glory. Not, of course, that these opposers would take that crown to put it upon their own heads. Not that, but that they would lead them on to an apostasy which would be the loss of their crown. These enemies revealed their diabolic aims by striving to conduct the faithful followers of the Lord down to perdition. It may have been sheer envy that moved them to carry on their infamous work which would have resulted in the eternal shame of these humble saints. Their aim was to rob that godly people of their highest honor and their eternal glory.

Appropriately was the one charge from heaven to this humble church, exposed as it was to such great danger, that they would not allow their crown to be taken away from them. The earnest exhortation was, "Hold that fast which thou hast received." How was this to be done? How were they to keep hold of their crown so that it should not be taken from them? Manifestly by closely watching all the schemes of the enemy, as well as the weaknesses of their own treacherous heart; by untiring efforts to maintain the fervor of their piety; by guarding closely against every approach of spiritual danger; by keeping vividly before them that crown of glory into which their present crown would soon be changed; and chiefly by a firm faith that their living Lord would ever stand by them. This must they do with all

their might: for to lose their patience, their faith, and their piety would be to lose their crown. If they yielded to the seductions ever pressing upon them their glory would be gone.

The charge thus given to the small but faithful church of Philadelphia might involve many a struggle that would be trying to the flesh; but it would not be long. Their Lord cheers them by what to them must have been most comforting: "Behold, I come quickly!" Whatever that coming meant, whether it was to be in judgment upon the world at the predicted hour of temptation or in the way of escape for his people, this must have been to them a most comforting word. The close of their temptations and of their sufferings was near at hand. Could they but hold on to it for a little while longer, they would behold their crown both safe and untarnished. The charge to them was the old appeal of Gethsemane: "Watch with me one hour." Already were they crowned kings and priests in the church on earth; very soon would they wear the crown of glory in the sanctuary above.

### 14. GENERAL PROMISES.

In treating this message to the church of Philadelphia we have not, as in the others, devoted a section to the "overcometh" it contains, because the whole texture of the communication involves that point. The one great duty contained in the passage is that of resisting or overcoming the seductions of the synagogue of Satan, and therefore nothing more than the general obedience to the charge is needed. To overcome the temptations of the Jews is the one idea of the whole message.

We therefore proceed at once to consider the wonderful promises to all the faithful of all ages and places with which the message closes. In several respects this is the most interesting general promise of all the seven. As is usual with all these promises, it arises out of the peculiarities of the message, while at the same time it is of universal application to all the churches. It is directly related to the central idea: "I have set before thee an open door" —an open door of escape from the shocks of the earthquake, and then a condition safe and stable, as a pillar that shall move or totter no more. In each element of the promise there is special honor engaged for that people who were so humble and so unflinching in their faith. It is as if to that church so greatly beloved, the Son of man would open the very treasury of divine riches. Not simply is it a promise, but it is a cluster of promises all of them wonderfully precious and very abundant and varied in their char-

acter. Among the peculiarities which arrest our attention in these divine engagements are such as these: the singular and impressive pillar, emblem of the fixedness in glory which God would give; the significant expression, "*my God*," repeated four times over within a single verse; and the no less than five items in the general promise, or rather five distinct promises in this one glorious cluster. With this last peculiarity we begin, and will make it our guide in analyzing this marvelous engagement into which God here enters with all his churches.

The first of these points in the general promise is: "Him that overcometh will I make *a pillar in the temple of my God*." The essential idea of this figure is undoubtedly that of stability—stability after insecurity, confusion, and alarms. Its peculiar appropriateness here is in that it was entered into with a people whose life-dread was that of the devastation of earthquakes. Permanence and safety in the midst of unexpected terrors is the divine engagement. Instead of rushing out at the first symptoms of the coming crash, there would be firm rest and a quiet sense of security —this as a most impressive promise. The column of Trajan has stood unshaken in Rome for over eighteen centuries; the pyramids of Egypt have rested amid the sands for thousands of years: so would it be with this symbolical pillar of the faithful. It was a promise that their faith should stand for evermore on Him who was the Rock of Ages. It was covenanted by this singularly significant emblem that the patient sufferers for Christ's sake should finally be delivered from all the commotions of earth and sin, and that they would be established immovably in the promised rest of Christ.

Most writers consider that this promise to the patiently faithful Christians of Philadelphia, and through them to all believers, that they would be made pillars in the temple of God, is an intimation of the glorious prospect of different degrees in the bliss of the saints in the heavenly world. The body of the living temple of the ransomed shall be composed of the community of believers, but the pre-eminently devoted on earth shall be honored as the pillars thereof. In his exceedingly valuable additions interspersed throughout Lange's *Commentary on the Apocalypse*, Dr. Craven remarks that "This passage is but one of many which set forth the pre-eminence of the victorious saints of the present dispensation, in the future æon of blessedness and glory. In one place they are the *first-fruits* unto God and the Lamb; in another they are the *bride* of the Lamb; in another they are

*kings* and *priests* unto God;—here they are *pillars* in the heavenly temple. The subject is mysterious, but gloriously sublime."

There is one fact concerning this emblematic pillar, to which we must devote our very special attention. In accordance with this covenant promise to the church of Philadelphia there is still found in that city an old pillar which has evidently stood there unmoved since the time when that promise was first uttered. In every picture and photograph of the city which any of us have ever seen, the pillar was there. All through the ages of time it has been standing; there it is to-day. Ages have worn away, storms have raged, fissures have opened in the ground, enemies have devastated; but there it has stood unmoved, year after year, age after age, century after century. All the rest of the city has been again and again prostrated by the earthquake-shocks, but there still has towered up the immovable pillar. It stands absolutely alone of all that once constituted the old city. The antiquity of its form shows without a question that it is the solitary monument of long by-past ages. There is no difficulty in telling that it is a remnant of centuries long gone even before the present ruins of the city had formed its houses and temples and towers. All of old Philadelphia is gone, but there is this single monument which was there in the day when this message came down from the throne.

How came it to pass that it has stood on unshaken through all the passing ages, while all else was shaken to the dust around it? What but God's own omnipotent hand could have kept it standing, and that as a proof and illustration of the veracity of this word of promise which he had spoken to that beloved church? Even the historian Gibbon, with all his intense and never-abating hostility to Christianity, records this remarkable fact, though he would not do even that without a sneer at the humble followers of Christ. His remarkable confession, which we quote in full, is as follows: "In the loss of Ephesus the Christians deplored the fall of the first angel, the extinction of the first candlestick of the Revelation. The desolation is complete, and the temple of Diana or the church of Mary will equally elude the search of the curious traveler. The circus and the three stately theatres of Laodicea are now peopled with wolves and foxes; Sardis is reduced to a miserable village; the God of Mohammed, without a rival or a son, is invoked in the mosques of Thyatira and Pergamos, and the populousness of Smyrna is supported by the foreign trade of the Franks and Armenians; Philadelphia

alone has been saved, by prophecy or by courage. At a distance from the sea, encompassed on all sides by the Turks, her valiant citizens defended their religion and freedom above fourscore years, and at length capitulated with the proudest of the Ottomans. Among the Greek colonies and churches of Asia, Philadelphia is still erect—a column in a scene of ruins—a pleasing example that the paths of honor and safety may sometimes be the same." There stands that column to-day to certify, as it has certified through all the successive generations that God's engagements are firm and changeless. There it is to testify of the immovable rock on which the gospel is based, and that it is ever the same amid all the commotions of wars and of ages.

The second item in this promise is contained in the words, "*And he shall go no more out.*" "I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out." There is here a change in the imagery; or, dropping metaphor altogether, the teaching is that the devoted Christian on earth shall never be allowed to fall from his lofty station in glory. At any rate the meaning of the passage is perfectly obvious. When the earthquake-shocks began to awaken the first alarms, the inhabitants of house or city would rush out for safety into the open country. But the promised spiritual state of the saint hereafter would never have such danger or alarms. For him all the earthquake-tossings of sins, sorrows, troubles, fears, and commotions would be over for ever; they would be unknown in his blessed rest—all then will be settled and permanent for evermore. As that pillar in Philadelphia has remain unmoved for all the centuries, so shall they rest in undisturbed peace through all the myriads of the eternal ages. They shall be fixed for ever in glory. They shall go no more out: for they shall be beyond the possibility of being lost. He "that openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth," had opened for them the door of admission into glory, and he had also closed against them the door of exit therefrom. Like the elect angels, they could not possibly be banished from the realms of the blessed. Wondrously cheering is the divine engagement, as eloquently described by Dr. Tristram; "'Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out.' What Christian, feeling himself a pilgrim here, could so thoroughly realize the permanence of his eternal home, under the figure of a pillar in the temple of his God, as one whose earthly home, shattered repeatedly by the heaving of the unstable earth,

and often rent and overthrown by the earthquake, reminded him by its cracks and fissures of the insecurity of all human buildings?" Time after time had all the marble columns of the temples of Philadelphia been laid low. The shattered and gaping walls of this city needed so often to be repaired that the burden of their maintenance had, we are told, utterly impoverished the citizens. But to the promise of stability was added the promise of permanence of residence: 'He shall go no more out.' He who had so often fled into the open field at the premonitory rumbling; he whose house had so often been deserted when he had camped in the plain, out of reach of the falling dwellings (for the historian tells us how the inhabitants had for the most part to live in the open country);—he, of all others, could appreciate the promise, 'He shall go no more out'—for no earthquake can move the eternal pillars, no shaking of the strong foundations drive out the inhabitants of the eternal city."

The third item of the general promise is, "*I will write upon him the name of my God.*" As we enter upon the consideration of this point we meet with two significant things. The first is that, as already stated, in a single verse here we have the expression, "my God," repeated no less than four times: "the *temple of my God*:" "the *name of my God*," "the *city of my God*," and "*out of heaven from my God.*" What is this but the emphatic assertion that the Father also acquiesces in these promises of the Son? "So do I engage," saith the exalted Lord; "and in that engagement does my Father also agree." It is repeated to make the divine assurance the more impressive. It is the glorious concurrence of the Father and the Son, making these pledges to the faithful come home to their souls with the greater positiveness.

The second remarkable thing is that on the ransomed in glory shall be inscribed the three sublime names—the "name of my God," the "name of the city of my God," and "my new name." As the names of the renowned of earth are engraved on pillars and other enduring objects, so should the faithful be distinguished by glorious titles, and be had in undying remembrance—this is the leading thought of these promises. Since the saint, however, is to be as a pillar of the ages, he is himself to bear these celestial names. Before others of the ransomed multitude, and before the angels, he is specially designated as God's own follower. Thus should it be known by all creatures to whom he belonged, and to whose glory he was for ever dedicated. That name—the "name of my

God" would he bear for evermore, as belonging in his whole being and power to the Lord Jehovah, his Creator. That name of highest sublimity would be the bright badge through which he would stand revealed in the eyes of every beholder. "This is the Lord's own honored servant" would be the pre-eminent distinction that he would evermore bear in the sight of all beings by whom he would be ever seen and admired.

The next name promised is that of the city of God: "*I will write upon him the name of the city of my God, which is the new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God.*" That sublime name would be so enstamped upon the glorified saint, that wherever found he would be recognized as one of its honored citizens. He would have the freedom of the city of the New Jerusalem. To such patient sufferer for the cause of his Lord the pledge is given that he would have right to enter into the gates of the New Jerusalem, and that no being would be permitted to hinder him. As a victor returning from the field of battle, he would be honored as one of heaven's citizens, and be entitled to all the privileges of that metropolis of glory. That city is no further described here, in this part of the Sacred Book; but it is in the closing chapters of the Apocalypse, where its jasper walls, its golden streets, and gates of pearl are portrayed in all their brightest glories. It was to be the New Jerusalem, for which Abraham and other saints so earnestly longed, and which since then has passed away from the glories of earth.

This City of the Saints is here represented as "coming down out of heaven from my God." "Coming down out of heaven," as that city whose builder and maker is God! "Coming down out of heaven" to earth, growing more and more real, visible—almost already entered by the ransomed of the Lord. What a wondrous abode that must be, even if we know no more of it than what is implied here in the names which were given to it by the inspiring Spirit of the Lord, though his servants! It is the Great City, the Holy Jerusalem—as the old Jerusalem, but she had forfeited that name for ever. It is the "Jerusalem which is above;" "the city of the living God;" "the holy city." Very sublimely and truthfully did one of the Greek Fathers speak of it as "that Beautiful City," and another as the "Metropolis of Heaven." It is the city which is *new*, in that sin never entered it; and at the same time it is the oldest of all. But who can imagine or describe that celestial abode? What exalted con-

ceptions of it must have been in the mind of old Bernard of Clugny as he wrote:

"Me receptet Sion illa,—
Sion, David urbs tranquilla,
Cujus faber Auctor lucis,
Cujus portæ lignum Crucis."

With what rapture must he have been filled as he thought: "Zion shall open its gates to me—Zion, David's city of rest; Zion, whose builder is the Creator of the light; Zion, whose very gates are formed of the wood of the cross." Oh, that city of glory, over whose sublime portal gleams "*Jehovah-Shammah*" for evermore! "I will write the name of the city of my God"—it is at least a curious coincidence that this city of the old Philadelphia church should bear as its name even to the present day, "*the City of God!*" Is there no providential guidance in this? Has not the same divine power that preserved the pillar also preserved the name as a testimony to all the successive ages?

The climax to all the pledges and names engaged to the pre-eminently faithful is the close: "I will write upon him *my new name.*" What means this? Doubtless to be enstamped with the name of Christ would imply that the highly favored saint belonged to Christ, or represented Christ in some pre-eminent manner. As remarked by the pious commentator, Thomas Scott: "Thus would the Lord own his patient follower as one of his chosen people: a trophy of his victory over the world, sin, Satan, and death, and a monument erected by the power of his arm, the truth of his Word, the efficacy of his atonement and mediation, and the unsearchable riches of his grace."

But by the *new name*, especially, what is meant? Not the name Lamb, so often occurring in this book—for that is not new, but as old at least as the Passover; not the Word, or Christ, or Son of man, or King of kings; these are all appropriate and most blessed titles of our Redeemer, but they cannot, any of them, be this *new name*, for they are all old and well-known by all the saints of the Lord. Not these, but something else as yet unknown, probably something which could not as yet be comprehended or communicated. It is to be some new title earned by the sublime achievements of his humiliation and exaltation. It will be some new revelation of Christ's glory of which as yet even his most devoted followers do not dream—a name never heard except among the ransomed at the Throne. It will be some mysteri-

ously sublime name, unknown to any creature, and of which there comes to us but a dim intimation in the Revelation: "His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns: *and he had a name written that no man knew but he himself.*" Thus the pledge is here given that in some sublime way, throughout eternity he will share this new and glorious name with his ransomed followers: "I will write upon him my new name," and, with the name, he will also impart of the mysterious mediatorial character and glory.

We are now prepared, in the retrospect, to form an estimate of the riches and the abundance of the treasure in this general promise made to the faithful and humble church of Philadelphia, and, through it, to all the patient and suffering followers of Christ, in every church and every age. Here have we, in the baptismal formula of glory, the "name of my God," "my own new name," and the name of the Zion of the Holy Ghost; the truths attested four times over by "my God"—the emphasized "name of my God" the "name of the city of my God" and "my own new name;" the "pillar" as stable as the ages; the "go no more out" from the bliss of eternity; the citizenship of heaven as a glorious home; the sharing with Christ in the enjoyment of his own highest honor,—and all these as but dim shadows of the blissful realities.

### 15. THE CITY AS IT IS NOW.

Philadelphia is a city still; and, for that land, a city of exceptional prosperity. Though it has stood for two thousand years, it has even yet a population of over fifteen thousand souls. Protected by the hand of God, the candlestick of the church has never been removed; for it has still five congregations, with their five church edifices that are used, and about twenty others which have fallen into decay. It and the church of Smyrna are the only ones against which there is no rebuke, and that are in a prosperous or even living condition. As to Philadelphia, this is the more remarkable in that it is not sustained through the influence of the commerce of other lands, as is that of Smyrna.

The city still shows the same peerless beauty which it did eighteen hundred years ago. There is still the vast plain of matchless fertility sweeping out around it, the little Cogamus brook dashing down over the rocks on the hill-side and then meandering for many a league through fields and meadows, on to the very suburbs of Sardis; the old Hermus flowing on, just as it has done without a pause for century after century; the moun-

tain peaks of snow, with their heads shrouded in white, or bathed in sunlight, or forming romantic shadows under the silvery moon; the fragrant gardens, or solemn olive-groves sloping up the mountain sides, or sleeping around the ruined walls and towers. Concerning its location one intelligent traveler writes: "The country, as viewed from the hills behind the city, is exceedingly magnificent; gardens and vineyards lying at the back and sides of the town, and before it one of the most extensive and beautiful plains of Asia. Across the summits of the hill behind the town, and the small valleys between them, runs the town wall, strengthened by circular and square towers, and forming also an extensive and long quadrangle in the plain below." Another who had personally examined the place writes: "The lower hills just behind the city are composed of the detritus washed down from the mountains above, picturesquely worn and wooded, and form a vast amphitheatre, from the crest of which there is a magnificent view of the town, with its ruined walls, and here and there a great block of ancient masonry rising from the midst of a wilderness of gardens and orchards. The country around resembles a billowy sea suddenly petrified. Old streams of lava, with their surface decomposed into rich black soil, may be traced in every direction, clad with luxuriant verdure, here and there interrupted by a bold protuberance, a dark basaltic dyke pushed above the lava. But in front of the town a fertile belt extends, about five miles in width. In early summer it presents the appearance of a gorgeous carpet: for the principal product is opium, and the poppies, white, lilac, and purple mingled indiscriminately, are in full bloom." The vast space which the city covers—with its three concentric walls nearly shattered into the dust, its half-hidden and half-ruined old narrow streets, its vast masses of ruined heaps here and there, its massive towers rising up in confusion in their dreary unsightliness, and all over the formless acres of buildings—is a very wilderness of verdant olive trees and solemn cypresses. Such is Philadelphia when it first meets your eye, as you approach that spot made sacred by the memory of this first church and these first gospel days, by the preaching there of John, and Paul, and Timothy, and by this message of the seven, sent down to it directly from the throne of the Glorious One who was seen to walk in the midst of the golden candlesticks, and to hold in his hands the keys of that kingdom which is decreed to rule over all, and to continue while the world shall stand, and eternity endure.

As to the present strength of this old city and church, in which we cannot help feeling a more than ordinary interest, we have tolerably full and accurate information. At the present day it has a population of about fifteen thousand souls. Of these about ten thousand, or two-thirds, are Turks, who are the dominant class, and the rest, or about five thousand, are nominally Christians, of the Greek faith. As usual, there is a sprinkling of Jews, but what proportion of the entire population they constitute we are not informed. As is often the case in these Oriental lands, most of the money-dealing is conducted by the Armenians, another sect of the degenerate Christians. They are largely the bankers, the brokers, the money-lenders, even the merchants of the place. Even more so than the Jews, they are the money kings of the leading Turkish communities.

The business of the inhabitants, and their modes of life, are very much the same that they were in the days of these Apocalyptic messages. The water of the Cogamus has still the same quality of producing superior dyes. The tints of the cottons colored in them are considered far superior to those of any other quarter of the Levant; and many of the Philadelphians are engaged in that industry. The volcanic plain and hill-slopes are still covered over with terraces and vineyards which give employment to multitudes of farmers, mechanics, and wine merchants. The production of opium—an industry unknown to the ancients—is now a sad feature of the place. The caravan route to Persia, passing through the city and up the river, gives to it its greatest life and activity, for it brings thousands of passing strangers, and fills the streets with the sounds of unknown tongues.

These are the leading articles of the place, and its chief sources of wealth, and even serve to keep it in existence while so many other towns are utter ruins. It is through them that it has remained a place of so much importance during so many changes of the centuries. Like most Oriental life, however, it is subject to so little change as to stand generation after generation an abiding witness to the character of past days. Indeed, there are some things in which there appears to be scarcely any alteration for a score of centuries.

The religious condition of the city at the present time, though so much of it is nominally Christian, is deplorable in the extreme. There is, it is true, a population of five thousand who are named Christian, and they have six Christian churches which

are used, besides about a score of others which have fallen into utter ruin, having been destroyed by earthquakes. Of these sacred ruins, a traveler tells us, one forms by far the most conspicuous object in the city—more conspicuous than any of the six mosques that are among the first things which one sees there. It was undoubtedly the old cathedral, and is still called the Church of the Holy Theologian—that is, of the apostle John. Its massive pilasters tower high above the modern buildings, with large blocks of masonry, but the arches which sprang from them have long since been overthrown. The fragments of many ancient temples were employed in its construction. The piers and lower parts of the wall are built of stone and marble, while the arches, of some of which the springs remain, are of brick. Many niches and brackets may yet be seen in the walls, and portions of mutilated inscriptions remain, built into many of the modern churches.

To this old ruined church the faithful repaired, and there they probably received this message from their Lord; and in it, it is more than probable, the beloved friend of Jesus often uttered his tender appeal, "Brethren, love one another!" But these few Greek Christians, infinitely superior though their faith is to that of the ten thousand Mohammedans by whom they are surrounded—what are they as the salt of that whole corrupting mass? Even their bishop could not tell one of our missionaries the names of some of the leading books of the Bible; and scarcely one of its twenty or thirty priests could read the Sacred Word. Still it is a church, and has at least the idea of a Redeemer. The light has not all gone out. It is composed of the descendants of those by whom the crown of glory was possessed.

### 16. PLACE IN THE BEACON.

If it be true that every item of church and Christian life, good and bad, in these messages was intended to be predictive of similar forms or tendencies in the Church through all succeeding time, then it is certain that we have a most important admonition here as to those who would ever form a large portion of the professed followers of Christ. The intention was doubtless to forewarn that there would always be many weak churches and poor members. That this would be an abiding feature of the kingdom was intimated in a most impressive manner. That humble churches, and humble individuals in every church, were to be a constituent element in the economy of Christ's earthly administration, was here clearly revealed. And the

importance thereof in the mind of Christ is manifested in that twice over do the messages promise a crown to the poor and patient believers. The only churches which have such promise are Smyrna in its poverty, and Philadelphia in its little strength. These both, and these only, would be crowned, even here. Was this without significance? was it meaningless that these two poor churches were followed by the divine favor throughout all the generations, and that even to the present hour they have a people and a standing above all the others? and was it without special significance that this fact should have such a prominent place in this Beacon of the ages? Undoubtedly this is our Lord's emphatic publication to all the churches that there would evermore be the humble and patient sufferers among his people, and that these would be especially dear to him.

This patient endurance for his sake would be carefully noted by him. That humility and patience were what would render them dear to him, what he would write in the book of remembrance, and what would be confessed in heaven, before the Father and before his angels, to their everlasting honor. That they are now small in the esteem of men is no indication that they are small in the sight of God. It is not much to such faithful souls what men may think of their humble sacrifices for the cause of Christ, but what God thinks of them. What men despise and persecute is often what the all-seeing King of glory holds in the highest esteem. How often does he who walks in the midst of the golden candlesticks pass by gorgeous temples, swelling organs, and glittering equipages, for a few humble and obscure souls who, true to the cause of their God, assemble where they are neither seen nor cared for by the proud and the great of earth!

Moreover, the Lord of the Church proclaims to all the patiently suffering for his sake not only that his loving eye is upon them, but also that when they shall be sorely pressed by evil, he will appear for their deliverance in some surprising manner. Their apparent weakness and want of influence will prove no impassable barrier in their way, even in their time of greatest need. In that very crisis will he set before them an open door—the door most needed. He will open some way of escape, and it shall be seen that he is mighty and prompt to deliver. No matter how weak is any church, how few and obscure its members, or how powerless the two or three who form its assemblies, he will be there in the plenitude of his power. The universal and glorious engagement he makes, and, in this Beacon, holds up, bright and cheering, to all the faithful, is that he will grant special grace for special times of need.

How grandly cheering the unalterable promise that the weakest and most helpless of the seven churches are those to which the very richest clusters of blessings are made sure! Philadelphia and Smyrna, the poorest of all, are the ones before which are set the richest rewards. It is not the crowd of the half-hearted which have this promised honor; it is to the twelve who gave up all for Christ's sake that the thrones are assured; to the three hundred of Gideon's band, with their pitchers and lamps, that the victory was given. "There is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few," and he often chooses to give that honor to the few, in order that his strength may be glorified by the weakness of men.

And all these facts of the divine administration are here, in the Beacon, raised up on high, for the humbling of the proud and for the encouragement of the humble. This is the portion which Philadelphia contributes to the light of that Beacon. How important in the sight of God does it show this element of church life—the element of humble suffering and service—to be! It was in substance a proclamation made to all the faithful to the end of time: "Ye two or three faithful ones, your case is not hopeless; look at the Beacon!—There has your Lord placed this great fact for your cheer and hope! Little praying circle, be not discouraged; pray on, look to the Beacon! Thy model is the little band of Philadelphia; it is the pledge of thy God—the rich cluster of promises in this message is all for thee. Ye only, of all the churches, are of such a name and standing as to claim their glorious fulfilling."

This point calls for very close attention in these days of such deplorable indifference to the claims of God and the soul and eternal realities. The faithful Christian returns from the sanctuary with his heart sore because of what he has just witnessed on the day and in the place where he had hoped to find sweet peace and comfort. Why did he meet in the streets so many young men whom he had longed to find in the house of God? Why such a mere handful of worshippers in the sacred place where the divine Lord had promised to meet his friends? Why, on the evening of the Lord's day, the sanctuary almost empty? Why do the world and the things of the world—its excitements, its politics, its fashions, its pleasures, its amusements, its sciences and improvements—fill up all the thought and conversation and interests of men wherever he turns or meets them? And then, oh how sad the slights and insults, the cold neglect or positive hostility to the kingdom over which his loving Jesus reigns, whose blessed aim is the redemption of our race, the elevation of mankind, and the

happiness of the pure and noble inhabitants of the celestial world! Is it any wonder that the true child of God should feel crushed and sore in heart at the sight of these things, until he hears the cheering words of his almighty Friend: "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

To the "little flock" does the loving Father's great heart turn, and with a just and devoted parent's desire to make happy his weaker child does he shower gifts upon it, gifts of royalty such as only the King of time and eternity knows how to bestow. Yea, a still higher and grander consideration may properly animate the soul of the faithful follower of the heavenly King: it is that the glory of that King is intimately associated with that of his people. If he triumph, so shall they also be victorious over every foe. If he reigns in glory and honor and immortality, so shall they also reign with him over all nations. Since the gates of hell shall not be able to prevail against him, his people need not fear any power that shall threaten them. Rejoice, ye children of the kingdom! ye are safe; for the shield of Omnipotence is over you!

# LAODICEA.

## THE WRETCHED ONE.

## THE MESSAGE.

And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write: These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;

I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.

So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:

I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and *that* the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

# CHAPTER XIV.

## THE WRETCHED ONE.

### 1. THE MESSAGE.

In beginning our investigation of this message to the church of Laodicea we feel, not only that we are entering upon a new field of research, but also upon one that is very interesting. The city is sometimes called by an old name, *Ledik*, which connects the present ruins with the old city; but the name which is commonly given to it by the Turks is that of *Eski-Hissar*, "The Old Castle." Why this name we cannot tell. We have met with no explanation of its origin or significance. It was doubtless given by the modern inhabitants of the country in memory of some object or event connected therewith. In the message there are two peculiarities by which it is distinguished from all the others, and which must therefore receive our special consideration.

One is that there is in it not one word of approbation. Not one thing is noticed in its praise, even by Him whose heart is so full of forbearance and tenderness. What a strange pre-eminence! What a sad stigma even in the silence! How deep the disgrace of that people in the portraiture of whose Christian character there is not even one faint spot of brightness! And what gives it its saddest pre-eminence is that in this it stands alone. In the records of Ephesus we read of a "first love;" of Smyrna, concerning a heavenly riches; of Pergamos, "thou holdest fast my name;" of Thyatira, "thy charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience;" of Sardis, "thou hast a few names;" and of Philadelphia, "thou hast kept the word of my patience;" but of Laodicea not one expression of commendation is to be found. "It was lukewarm without exception, and therefore it was wholly loathsome." This omission in such connection and circumstances was dreadful. No words could have told the story so well. It fixed a stigma upon the church of Laodicea which could never be effaced. This brand impressed by God's own hand upon the crime in his sight of lukewarmness was fearfully significant. Did it not say, as if in words engraved in eternal remembrance: Worse,

in God's sight, than the backsliding of Ephesus; worse than the lewdness of Pergamos; worse than the fornication of Thyatira; worse than the hypocrisy of Sardis, is this lukewarmness of Laodicea. O Laodicea! with all thy wealth, and culture and pretentiousness, what art thou, with this Heaven-impressed brand upon thy brow!

The other striking peculiarity of the message to this church is that there is in it no mention made of any opposers or seducers, or foes of any kind, as standing in the way against it. Was this the reason for its deplorable lukewarmness? Was it because there were no opposing currents to fan up its zeal that that zeal seems to have utterly expired? Was it because there was no goodness to be found in the place that would excite opposition? Certain it is that we have no hint of any such obstacle as standing in the way of this church. In this also it had a doubtful, if not a bad pre-eminence. No defilers of the truth as at Ephesus; no blaspheming Jews as at Smyrna; no murderous persecutors as at Pergamos; no vile Jezebel as in Thyatira; no synagogue of Satan as in Philadelphia, were in Laodicea to oppose the cause of Christ. Was it because Satan found no need to make war upon that church? Or was her settling down upon the lees the result of her having no enemies, contending with whom would have kept her life and zeal at least in some measure of vigor?

Very impressively has Canon Tristram presented this deeply momentous thought: "It has been already remarked that the only two churches addressed, with reference to which there is no mention either of foes without or of traitors within, are just those two which were in the most deplorable spiritual condition —Sardis and Laodicea. Cold and dead, sunk in slumber, they slept on, undisturbed by heathen persecution or false Jews. No Nicolaitans corrupted their doctrine, no followers of Balaam, no seducing Jezebel rent the church, and at the same time constrained them earnestly to contend for the truth. It was just, perhaps, because she had not gainsayers nor heretics to resist that the church of Laodicea did not learn to grasp more firmly and to prize more highly the truths she so coldly held. It was not good for them to be without the necessity of doing battle for the truth. What is this but the lesson which all Church history teaches, that when the Church has settled down at ease, supreme apparently over all around, she has lost, first her watchfulness, and then her faithfulness? The struggles of the second century prevented the Church from settling down into a philo-

sophical sect. The oft-recurring heresies of the third century caused all doctrine pertaining to the person and offices of our blessed Lord to be so defined that clearness of dogma on these great points, and orthodoxy were ever afterward inseparable. The dominant church of the Middle Ages, on the contrary, lost all its life and its love, and sank into the dark sleep of death so soon as it had conquered the world, and the history of the eighteenth century in England and Scotland is almost a repetition of the same sad story."

This is a point in the message which deserves to be very carefully pondered. It intimates with great distinctness that in our present imperfect state, opposition and persecution are needed to bring out the full graces of the Christian character; while at the same time it causes the depravity and evil tendencies of the heart to appear in the more glaring light that such a people as these of Laodicea should sink so low in their spiritual state when there was no enemy to oppose their growth in every grace.

### 2. LOCATION.

The usual route to Laodicea was up from the coast through the Meander valley; and that fact serves, so far, to fix the location of the city. As we have already seen, this was the southern one of the two great rivers which drained the whole highlands of the interior; the other, the Hermus, falls into the sea at Smyrna, and this, on the south, at Miletus, not far from Ephesus. The valley through which this river flows was one of the most celebrated in all western Asia. Fertile and picturesque in itself and its surroundings, it was also famous because of many historic events with which its name was associated. Among others, several miles up from its mouth lay the "Asian Meadows" to which the lines of Homer have given a celebrity that has passed into most of the elegant languages of the world. One hundred miles up this river, following its flexuous course, amid its headwaters, was located this great city.

Another thing that will aid us in comprehending its location is that it was situated on one of the two great highways of commerce from the Ægean Sea into the territory of the interior. From Smyrna in the north and Ephesus in the south there were two great lines over which most of the merchandise through the land was carried. We can easily see that the traffic up the Meander valley must have been immense. On the one end of it lay the Ægean Sea, with its waves washing the shores of Greece

and the Grecian Archipelago, and its navigation touching nearly every known port of commerce. This commerce, concentrating at the ports of Miletus and Ephesus, would send its greatest volume up the valley to Laodicea, and thence into the upland plateau of the interior; on still, to the Euphrates and Persia, and still farther, to India. A great Roman road had been constructed along the route, and we can easily conceive how busy a scene it must have presented, with the wares of all the Mediterranean ports carried in one direction, and those from the East in the other. The busiest centre of all that line of highway would be the city of Laodicea.

It would probably have been difficult to find another site in western Asia that had so many natural advantages. In addition to the one we have already mentioned, there were many others of a purely local character. It lay amid the head-waters of the Meander, where a large number of small streams flow together and unite in forming the large river. The riches of that river's valley naturally accumulated in it. It was, in fact, one great central valley into which mountain slopes on every side dipped down in the very affluence of fertility and beauty. It was abundantly watered, not only by the numerous brooks which poured down the mountain slopes, but also by the multitudes of perennial springs that are found over the whole region. It was, moreover, a volcanic district, and, like all such districts, it had a rich fertility. From all these local advantages numerous towns and villages surrounded it and the whole region teemed with a large and busy population.

So very important was the city at that time that it was frequently noticed and referred to by Josephus and other writers of the age, and we are therefore able to fix upon its location and surroundings with unusual accuracy. Its site was at the point where the great thoroughfare of commerce, having kept on its steady course for a long distance up the Meander valley, begins to penetrate the gorges into the mountains of the interior highlands. Crossing it here there is another great thoroughfare which, coming from the north, and passing through Sardis and Philadelphia, and running southward past Cadmus and other mountain ranges, keeps on its course until it reaches the Paphlagonian coast. On every side around it, at some miles' distance, there are great mountain ranges which, even among the uplands of the country, secure for it a salubrious temperature and pour down upon it the debris and water-brooks which give it a

climate so genial and a soil so rich that it is a very earthly paradise. On the north and west towers up the Messogis range of mountains, which bound the whole landscape with their snow summits; on the east, the country rises into a wilderness of ridges; on the south towers aloft Mount Cadmus, with innumerable surrounding hills, rising higher and higher; on the west, the Meander valley stretches on until the view is closed in by mountains, hills, and elevated plateaus. In the heart of all these lay this city. In many a valley and stretch of cultivated land, where magnificent oaks and other trees tower up in sublimity, and mountain gales sweep gently down, and verdure delights the eye, and the air breathes as if a very ocean of perfume, the traveler feels a longing desire to rest from his wanderings and make that charming vale his home.

The site of the city is on a little affluent called the Lycus, which flows from the south-east, and enters the Meander a mile or two below. On this account it was generally called "Laodicea on the Lycus," to distinguish it from several other cities of the same name. On this little stream there is a wide valley, on the southern extremity of which lay the city of Laodicea, while face to face with it on the north side, and about six miles farther up, was Hierapolis. These two cities lay in full view of each other, on opposite sides of the valley, and the stream flowed through the middle of the plain that was between them.

How came such a large and important city to be established there, in the heart of the mountains, only forty miles from Ephesus, and twenty-five miles from Philadelphia? Among its many advantages, placed in distinct view, were: (1) It was located at the head of the Meander valley, at the point where the great thoroughfare of that valley entered into the high table-lands of the interior. (2) It lay at the intersection of several leading highways of the country; among them the one just named, running east and west from the coast up into the farthest interior, and another north and south, from the Olympic region of mountains to the Paphlagonian coast. (3) It was at the very heart of a magnificent valley region which was walled around on every side by vast mountain ranges. (4) Because of its location among the head-waters of the great river, of the volcanic influences which gave the soil an incomparable richness, and of the many towns and villages which lay around it, it was one of the finest agricultural and manufacturing regions that was then known. (5) It was the great money centre or exchange of the whole land at that time, and had all the advantages which would neces-

sarily result therefrom. (6) It was the metropolis of the worship of Jupiter in all Asia Minor; on this account it not only bore a character of sanctity in itself, but it also drew to it the influence and the business activity of that famous worship and crowds of worshipers. (7) Still further, it was the capital of Phrygia at the time when the boundary of that nation was such as to include it in its territory; and so had all the advantages of that distinction.

From all these causes it resulted that Laodicea was one of the greatest and most important cities of the country, during the period when it was at the zenith of its glory; and that was the period of these messages.

### 3. THE CITY AT THAT TIME.

A most instructive volume was years ago written by Prof. Arnold Guyot of Princeton College, entitled *Earth and Man*, whose object it was to show that the physical features of a country have an important influence in forming the character of its inhabitants. The widest induction of instances and the closest inspection make this law very evident. Abundantly indented sea-coasts, mountain ranges, broad plains of low flat grounds, all have their effect in forming the character and fortunes of any people. The English, the Swiss, and the Dutch are all illustrations of this great general fact. Even special locations have their influence upon special communities. Laodicea was an instance. Its location was such as to render its inhabitants enterprising, rich and great. Its greatness made it proud. Its pride in self made it lukewarm in religion. Its lukewarmness made it wretched. Grace would have preserved it from that calamity; but worldliness in the people prevented grace from bearing its heavenly fruit.

The site of this city was remarkably favorable for the development of enterprise and worldly prosperity. It was located amid the little streams which united in forming the river Meander. Among these, coming in from the south-east was one little affluent called the Lycus. About a mile from where this enters the river, on a broad plain was the site of the renowned city. Partly rising up from the Lycus valley and partly as a spur from the mountains on the south, there was a cluster of five or six small volcanic hills; over these it was spread out for a considerable space. Because of a wilderness of small streams or brooks which flowed in from the mountains and of innumerable springs gushing out over the whole region, it had a fertility which attracted a dense farming population to the neighborhood. Outside of this again, and extending for many miles

in every direction, there were many villages, and even small cities of some celebrity, such as Colosse, Hierapolis, Derbe, Lystra, and others. The whole region, in fact, swarmed with a dense population.

A striking peculiarity of the neighborhood was the existence of remarkable mineral springs which influenced its whole character. These springs were very numerous, resulting no doubt from the mountain ranges by which the region was surrounded, and deriving much of their quality from the volcanic nature of the country. These waters held in solution an immense quantity of the carbonate of lime, which was deposited in the form of incrustations on everything with which it came in contact. Conducted about the vineyards and gardens, the channels became long fences, each as if a single stone. They were also singularly adapted for purposes of dyeing—a quality which was extensively used in coloring the wool in which the country abounded. Still another virtue of these waters was their invaluable medicinal properties. Like the waters of Saratoga, Aix-les-bains, and Baden-baden, they were resorted to by thousands for the removal of many diseases.

Among the various products of the vicinity and industries arising therefrom was that of the raising of wool. The immense mountain slopes rising over the whole land were covered with flocks of sheep, and their care was the leading element of all the farming. Their wool was of the finest texture, so that, at that time, it was famous throughout the world. This gave rise to large manufacturing enterprise and supplied a vast amount of commerce. Hence it arose, for instance, that the carpets of Laodicea were famed, not only then, but for centuries afterwards. Even to the present day, flocks of sheep on hills and plains form one of the most marked features of the landscape.

Arising from the same cause, as well as from the quality of the water of the streams, was the extensive industry of dyeing. Ancient writers frequently allude to this characteristic of Laodicea, and it must have been a very important industry of the place.

Still another extensive employment of the people was the tanning and coloring of leather. This is very often spoken of by ancient writers. Indeed, this and the weaving of linen are the chief employment of the inhabitants of the surrounding country even at the present day. From the innumerable flocks of sheep would come the hides, and from the forests on the mountain slopes would come the bark which the industry required.

It is probable, however, that the chief business peculiarity of Laodicea was that it was the leading money centre of the country.

It was the great financial exchange of proconsular Asia. Extensive money transactions were carried on by it with all the cities of that land, as well as with many other centres of trade. It lay at the crossing of so many routes of commerce and near the junction of so many provinces that it would necessarily become an important point of exchange. Roads passing through it, or starting from it, extended into Phrygia, Pamphylia, Cappadocia, Galatia, Lydia, and all the countries along the sea-coasts, and travelers would there provide themselves with the money they needed to carry with them in any direction. A curious glimpse of this we obtain in a letter of Cicero, wherein he states that on the way home from the province of which he was the governor, he had to stop at Laodicea in order to take up money to defray the expense of the rest of his journey.

It was, in fact, the greatest commercial emporium in the whole of Asia Minor. Its own manufactures gave rise to an immense traffic with the surrounding country. The sheep-raising and manufactures of wool, the extensive dyeing establishments, the tanneries all over the region, as well as the exporting and importing from east, west, north, and south, necessarily gave rise to a busy trade at home. Its peculiar location on the great highways of traffic occasioned great business activity. Add to all this its pre-eminence as a money exchange, and we may well understand why Laodicea was a vast mercantile emporium, and very rich.

Though the place it once occupied is now a scene of utter ruin and waste, in the days of its prosperity it must have been splendid in its magnificent buildings. Spread out over a wide space and covering a number of low hills or elevations it must have been beautiful beyond compare, with each of its eminences crowned by some splendid edifice. Here are still to be seen the ruins of a magnificent musical theatre; here the jasper pillars of some structure the very name of which has perished; and here the stupendous remnants of an amphitheatre that must have been spacious enough to contain thirty thousand spectators. It was strangely significant that this immense structure for bloody and inhuman shows was going up at the very time when the temple of Jerusalem was being destroyed by sacrilegious hands, and that it was new and beautiful and thronged by crowds at the very crisis when these seven messages were sent down to the churches from the heavenly throne. The very hands that tore down the temple of the living God were the hands that erected the blood-stained structure the broken fragments of which we may trace at the present day!

One inscription remains on the ground to tell us this strange

story. Its words are still legible; and their substance is that it was twelve years in building, and that it was erected under the patronage successively of Titus, Vespasian, and Trajan. This coupling together of these names on such an edifice leaves a strange impression. It led the Christian traveler, Arundell, to write: "What painful recollections are connected with this period! Twelve years were employed in building this place of savage exhibitions, and in the first of these years the temple of Jerusalem, which had been forty-eight years in building, was razed to its foundations, and of the Holy City "not one stone was left upon another, which was not thrown down." This "abomination of desolation" was accomplished by the very Titus to whom this amphitheatre was dedicated, and may have been—probably was—in honor of his triumph over the once favored people of God. Most likely in this very amphitheatre the followers of a crucified Redeemer were, a few years afterwards, exposed to the fury of wild beasts, by the order of the same Trajan.

This city was eminently rich and proud, as is intimated by the whole tenor of the message addressed to it. As such it was celebrated by all heathen writers. In Roman times it was one of the most distinguished cities of the land. "Many of its sons became merchant princes and lavished vast sums in the decoration of their native city. Strabo tells us of one merchant, Hieron, who adorned the city with many splendid buildings, and bequeathed at death the enormous sum of fifty millions of dollars to be applied to public purposes at Laodicea. The orator Zeno and the rhetorician Polemon, both of them natives of this city in the Roman times, were also conspicuous among its benefactors. Along with wealth there had evidently grown up a taste for arts, science, and literature. There was also a great medical school here, distinguished by the names of some of the most eminent successors of Galen. Some of the existing ruins have been supposed to be the porticos of these philosophers.

In material greatness the city was pre-eminent, but its moral condition was wretched. Its crowning sin was utter forgetfulness of God. From this, even in its Christian church, there flowed the inevitable result of a worldliness that was ruinous to souls. Pride, self-conceit, and all their apostate train followed. The numerous and splendid ruins, found even at the present day, attest the brutality of the amusements to which the inhabitants were addicted even amidst their ostentatious elegance. Here it

was, amid its glittering temples, that the beautiful temptress, Cleopatra, came to meet and propitiate Antony, and by her seductive charms conquered the conqueror. Here it was that, on a cross, the disciple Philip received the crown of martyrdom.

4. HISTORY.

Concerning the earliest history of Laodicea, Canon Tristram has given this account: "The roll of its olden history is a long one, extending from the establishment of the Greek empire to that of the Turkish. Pliny has given us its early traditions. They are not vague or mythic like those of Sardis. Trade, business, material prosperity, and luxury—not splendor, fame, or art—seem from the first to have been the pursuit of the Laodiceans. Pliny gives us its early history as known in his day. The Ionian Greeks, its probable founders, named it Diospolis, "the City of Jupiter," which was afterwards changed for the name of Rhoas, under which appellation it became the largest city of Phrygia. It suffered greatly during the wars of the successors of Alexander. At length Antiochus II. rebuilt it, and gave it the name of his wife, Laodice, whom he afterwards heartlessly divorced for the sake of a matrimonial and political connection with Ptolemy, king of Egypt." Two years afterwards this second union was dissolved, and that very Laodice for whom he showed his strong affection by giving her name to this great city, managed to effect her revenge by giving him the cup of deadly poison by which his wicked career was closed.

One hundred and seventeen years after its founding, or refounding, by Antiochus, or in B. C. 133, it was annexed to the Roman empire, and grew to be one of the most populous, wealthy, and splendid cities of Asia Minor. It suffered very greatly during the Mithridatic wars; for, being in the battle-ground region between the Roman and Persian powers, it was frequently exposed to the unparalleled cruelties of those horrible scenes.

In A. D. 62 the city was fearfully devastated by an earthquake —the curse of that whole country—which hurled to the ground a large part of its most splendid structures; and yet, so vast was the wealth of the place, that its inhabitants, without any aid from the dominating Romans, soon rebuilt it in more than its former splendor. During those years of its connection with Rome, the city was at the height of its greatness, and was, in fact, one of the most splendid cities of that country or age.

This message from heaven, in the year 96, with its awful warn-

ings and glorious promises, as well as keen rebukes and affectionate appeals, was probably heeded by the church; for afterward, even for centuries, we read of its holding a foremost place in the establishing of Christianity throughout the empire. It even grew to be a chief leader in the work of the kingdom during that age. At least sixteen other churches were known to have sprung from it, and to have long and happily flourished. So important did it become that several general councils of the whole Church were held there, and some of them have borne its name in all succeeding history.

After the city, with all the rest of Asia Minor, had fallen under the dominion of the Turk, it shared the sad downward fate of all other places where that ruinous power prevailed. An outline of its mournful decline and fall may be briefly given. "The city," says Dr. Chandler, "it is probable, became early a scene of ruins. About the year 1097 it was possessed by the Turks, and submitted to Ducas, general of the emperor Alexius. In 1120 the Turks sacked some of the cities of Phrygia, but were defeated by the emperor John Comnenus, who took Laodicea, and built anew or repaired the walls. About 1161 it was again unfortified. Many of the inhabitants were then killed, with their bishop, or carried into captivity with their cattle, by the Turks. In 1190 the German emperor, Frederic Barbarossa, going by Laodicea with his army, toward Syria, on a crusade, was received so kindly, that he prayed on his knees for the prosperity of the people. In 1196 this region, with Caria, was dreadfully ravaged by the Turks. With the decline and ultimate ruin of the city, the church also passed away from the pages of history." Says Lightfoot: "At length the very name of this primitive apostolic church passes wholly out of sight. The Turkish conquest pressed with more than common severity on these districts. When the day of visitation came, the church was taken by surprise. The long impending doom overtook her, and the golden candlestick was removed for ever from the eternal presence."

The church and city of Laodicea must for ever hold a prominent place in the hearts of all true believers because of three memorable things in the Church of God which are inseparably associated with them:

(1) This was the place from which the apostle Paul sent his first well-known epistle to Timothy, his beloved son in the faith. This we have asserted in the subscription to that epistle: "The first to Timothy was written from Laodicea, which is the chiefest city of

Phrygia Pacatiana." This is a trace of one of the footsteps of the great apostle which the church must hold as very precious.

(2) Here it was that the council was held which gave the earliest conciliar decision on the canonical books, giving the list of the Old and New Testaments substantially as it has been ever since. In the year 363, by the sixtieth canon of the Council of Laodicea, that list of the books was definitely given. It was just as we have it now, except that the Apocalypse was not included, about which there was some local controversy; "*and all the books were ordered to be publicly read in the churches.*"

(3) Another very important canon of the Council of Laodicea was that which officially defined and authoritatively established the *Lord's day* as the holy day of rest and worship. Its formal enactment was in these words: "*Christians should not judaize or rest from labor on the seventh day, but work on it as usual. But on the Lord's day they are to rest from labor, as far as possible, like Christians.*" These words are very important as proving the doctrine and practice of the early Church; nor less so are the comments of the Christian writers of that age, who observe that the exceptions are special cases, such as fighting to preserve men's lives against an enemy, toiling at the helm and oar to escape a storm, traveling to church for the worship of God, dressing food for a man laboring to save the life of man and beast—or the like. No word here of "*needed recreations or amusements*"—all of which are strictly prohibited. How must this appear to those of the present day who look with such an invidious eye upon our hallowed day—a great bulwark of our faith? This was over fifteen hundred years ago, and yet how sad it is that men would take away from us this venerable and priceless legacy of our Lord and his earliest followers! These words of its enactment are invaluable as showing that the godly men who lived so near to the fountain-head of the Church's history had no thought of triturating away all that was most precious in God's holy day.

### 5. DEITY OF THE CITY.

As with all the others, this city of Laodicea had its special deity for whom and his worship it was famed. That deity was Jupiter, king of all the gods and worshiped under various titles in most pagan lands. How much the idolatry of this the chief of the pagan deities had to do with giving celebrity and importance to this city we have no means of knowing, but doubtless it had very considerable. This connection of Laodicea with the cultus of Jupiter must

have been very ancient, inasmuch as its original name was *Diospolis*, or the City of Jupiter, afterwards changed to that of Rhoas, the fabled mother of all the gods; and afterward, when it was known as Laodicea, it was still the seat of the same original worship.

At the same time that the city was the metropolis of Jupiter's worship, there can scarcely be a question that the whole surrounding country had the same object of idolatrous service. The same tutelary deity would have his temples and priests and followers in every city and town throughout the adjoining region. We have a singular corroboration of this, as well as a remarkable confirmation of Scripture, in a well-known incident in the Acts of the Apostles, 14 : 13. In the progress of a missionary tour, Paul and Barnabas had reached Iconium, in the region of this city; and in consequence of a great miracle which they had wrought, the fickle mob jumped at the conclusion that they were gods, and "Then the *priest of Jupiter* which was before the city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people." Hence Jupiter of Laodicea was also the deity of Iconium of the same region. This is a fact the significance of which it is scarcely possible for us to mistake.

This fact of Laodicea being the metropolis of Jupiter, the chief of all the heathen deities, must necessarily have had an influence upon its daily life and character. This we would naturally expect, and this doubtless was the case to some extent; and yet we do not find much about it on record. We search in vain both in history and traditions for some corresponding descriptions of the grandeur of Jupiter's worship there. We read nothing of a celebrated temple, of the gathering of great crowds of devotees from the surrounding country, as we do in connection with the worship of Diana at Ephesus, or of Cybele at Sardis. There seems to have been no enthusiasm, no excited interest among the people of Laodicea, even in the worship of what was the leading deity of all heathenism.

Can we help the impression that they were too much engrossed in the making of money to be even good idolaters? And then, how fully does this accord with the character of its church as revealed in these messages! Its members had become utterly indifferent to the things of eternity through the absorbing pressure of the things of the present day. The church had no persecutions or opposition of any kind, because neither pagans nor Christians were interested enough about spiritual things to give them that earnest heed that would raise up either persecutors or persecuted.

Worldly, wealthy, money-making Laodicea! thy care for gaining riches had crushed out all time and thought for religion of any kind!

### 6. PLANTING OF THE CHURCH.

Concerning the beginnings of this church of Laodicea we have information that is fuller and that rests upon stronger probability than we have of any of the other churches save Ephesus. In the first place, we learn from reliable authorities that the money exchange and commerce of the place had attracted thither a large Jewish community; and, as usual, the gospel at first made its most rapid advances among them, because their knowledge of the true God had in some measure made them ready for its reception.

Then, it is all but certain that Paul, the greatest of missionaries, preached Christ there at first, and that with great power and success. In fact, there is scarcely a question that he was the honored man by whom the gospel was first planted there. The churches of Laodicea, Hierapolis, and Colosse, all situated in the region of the head-waters of the river Meander, were in the track of his missionary tours on various occasions, and he must have preached in them all, as we have positive information that he did in some of them. "We find that, 'After he had spent some time there (at Antioch, in the neighborhood) he departed and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order'—a statement which intimates that he made a regular tour through both districts. Though the historian here devotes only a single verse to his notice of this journey, it is obvious from his manner that it was not a hasty one, but occupied the apostle's time and labor for a considerable period. Macknight says that Paul, in his travels, appears to have gone directly to the chief cities in every country where he proposed to introduce the gospel. 'The policy and advantages of this plan are manifest; for in the great towns he would have an opportunity of making known his doctrines to multitudes at once, thus most rapidly effecting the diffusion of Christianity.' Two other journeys of Paul are noticed in the book of Acts in which he must have passed in the neighborhood of Laodicea; for he traversed Pisidia and Pamphylia, the adjoining provinces of Phrygia, and within a day's journey of the Apocalyptic city: 'And after they (Paul and Barnabas) had passed through Pisidia they came to Pamphylia.'"

It is certain, moreover, that in his writings he had a peculiar

interest and tenderness towards that people, as if arising from such peculiar relations in the past. In one place we find him writing to the neighboring church of Colosse: "When this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea. As to the epistle to which he here alludes, it most likely was some letter which he had sent them, but which has not been placed in the canon of Scripture. It appears also that this church had been drawn very near to his heart by some great trial or persecution which he had passed through for it, or while preaching the gospel there. To this he also refers in his epistle to the Colossians: "For I would that ye know what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh." From all this we can scarcely entertain a question but that the great apostle had at least a most active hand in establishing this important church of Laodicea.

There is also a tradition that the apostle Bartholomew labored diligently in planting the gospel here and in the surrounding country. Moreover, it is believed that the apostle Philip became such an eminent instrument in the same work as to call down upon himself the wrath of the persecutors, by whom, like his blessed Lord, he was put to death on the cross. A tradition which is more than merely probable gives us still another cause which contributed considerably to the rapid growth of this church at the beginning. It is known that in the year A.D. 63 a dreadful earthquake sent terror and ruin through Laodicea and the adjacent country; and the account is that the impression of this fearful visitation was such as to impel multitudes to flee to the God of the Christians for refuge from both the temporal and eternal ruin. A very wide and lasting tradition affirms this fact, and there is every likelihood that it was not without foundation. All these things conspiring—the large Jewish colony in the city, the preaching there of Paul and other apostolic men, and the solemnizing impression of the earthquake-shock—we can easily see why it was that the church became very soon so strong and influential.

### 7. TITLE OF THE SON OF MAN.

The title which, in this message, is given to the Lord of the churches, consists of three elements, each of which is new to us and marvelously appropriate here. The words conveying it are:

"These things saith *the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God.*" What, in the glorified Lord, does each of these indicate? why are all the three used? and what do they imply in their application to this particular church?

"*The Amen.*" This is an important term which is used in both Old and New Testaments to express a certain class of general but kindred ideas. Its essential purport is to signify that which is true, real, stable, decided, positive, and earnest. It is a declaration of certainty, an assertion of that which is confirmed, an affirmation of what is real and substantial. Christ is the embodiment, the personification of the truth. He is the veritable Amen. "All the promises of God in him are yea, and in him amen, unto the glory of God by us." He is expressly called the Amen in the Old Testament as well as here, near to the close of the New Testament. "*Elohim-Amen*" the Lord-Amen, is the title which is given to him in the prophecy of Isaiah. It is abundantly evident, then, that he is not only true, but the truth itself. He is the reality of all that is established, positive, substantial, immovable. He is the sure foundation of all that is reliable in the whole universe.

From all this it may be easily gathered why this peculiar epithet is applied to the Son of man in the message to the church of Laodicea. It is clearly intended to place this his glorious attribute in contradistinction to the wretched character of that people. He was true, real, earnest; while they were insincere, indifferent, fickle, false, and unreliable. In their insincerity and levity their condition was deplorable, inasmuch as they had to do with Him who was all real and would not be trifled with. They had everything to alarm them in that his whole nature was the very opposite of theirs. They dare not entertain the faintest shadow of a hope that he would condone their indifference to all that was true and solemn in their relations to him who had every righteous claim upon their entire being.

As the Amen, both his threatenings and his promises are as certain as if they had already been fulfilled. It would be contrary to his whole nature to deceive or mislead in the smallest measure. What he engages cannot fail of entire fulfillment. Neither want of perfect veracity, nor ignorance of every possible contingency, nor defect in power to carry out his fixed purpose, nor changeableness in his character, can cause any coming short in that which he has engaged to perform.

"*The Faithful and True Witness.*" The Son of man is perfectly qualified to bear witness of what was the real character

and condition of the church, of the estimation in which she was held by her divine Lord, and of the consequences which would assuredly follow—witness of all that, in heaven or earth, was of interest to the Church, in the past, at that time, or for evermore. As the Amen, the Truth, all that he asserts may be received with the utmost confidence: as the qualified Witness, all his declarations are according to the exact facts. He is the witness concerning God to all who profess to believe; and, consequently, what he addresses to the lukewarm church of Laodicea may be received as the established and solemn truth.

In saying of him that he is a faithful and competent witness there are three qualifications included. *First*, being eternal and divine, and having had his dwelling-place in heaven for evermore, he has with his own eyes seen that whereof he testifies. Of him especially it may be asserted: "He speaks what he knows, and testifies what he has seen." *Second*, as a perfect witness he is competent to relate all that he has seen and known. Every perfection is in him, and every power is in his prerogative. *Third*, he is willing and ready truthfully to declare all that which he knew so well. Love of truth and benevolence toward his people would ever lead him to impart all that would be for their highest welfare. The Son of man has all these attributes, and he is therefore the true, the competent witness to warm, instruct, and aid his lukewarm followers.

But he was also the *faithful* witness. He could and would declare the truth and nothing but the truth. He was the Amen, and all his utterances were final. He neither could nor would make any mistake. All his utterances would be the absolute reality. Moreover, they would be so perfect as to convey all that any case could possibly require. The members of the church of Laodicea might trust their all upon the words they should hear from his unerring lips. He is the one, great, glorious, ordained witness for all creatures in heaven and in earth. He is the one witness, and the only one, both ordained and competent to stand between God and man, and bear that sublime testimony on which the weal of the universe depends. The church of Laodicea should therefore give heed to his warning words. They were true, and they were infinitely important. They could not fail. Their all, both for this world and for the world to come, depended on their heeding his most earnest admonition.

"*The Beginning of the Creation of God.*" The whole of the interpretation of this part of the title of the Son of man depends

upon our ascertaining the right meaning of the word "beginning." We must have a distinct and correct understanding of this, or we shall have a very vague and inadequate idea of the point.

There are several opinions as to the import of the word as used here, each of which must give its own character to the meaning of the passage, and every one of which must be wrong that does not harmonize with the other elements of the title. Among such interpretations is that which would make the expression to signify the beginning or first one of created beings—the first one created—merely. But evidently this is contrary to the whole scope of other scriptures, especially in this book of Revelation, in which Christ is constantly spoken of as the Creator, and not as a creature; and Lord—not as the *beginning*, but as the *Beginner* of all things. We have many passages which make this very plain. Among them we may cite, in the Apocalypse: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last." Also, in Isaiah: "Thus saith the Lord, the King of Israel, and his redeemer, the Lord of hosts: I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God." Besides, how could he be a creature, when all creatures in heaven and earth are often represented as falling down to worship him? A single passage will make it plain that this excludes the thought of the possibility of his being a creature. In the sublime scenes of Revelation the four living creatures, representing all created being, are described as resting not day and night, "saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come. . . . Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."

Neither can those interpretations be correct which make the word to mean that he is the beginning of the resurrection, the first to rise from the dead; or that he is the commencement of the Church as now existing in the world. Such interpretations are in no sense pertinent to the subject, and cannot be considered as bearing on it.

What, then, is the true meaning of this expression? There can scarcely be a question but that it refers to the Son of man as the Prince of all creatures, the Principal of all the universe, the Lord, Ruler, of the whole world. The word translated "beginning" bears that significance in many, if not all other, places. He is the beginning, the head, the originator of all creatures. He is invested with authority and power as the sovereign Prince

of the creation in all its departments. In a word, "He is the origin, the author, and the ruler of the universe." It is more than probable that this peculiar form of expression concerning our Lord as the Beginning had its origin in the description of Wisdom as given in Proverbs: "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. . . . . When he prepared the heavens, I was there; when he set a compass upon the face of the deep. . . . Then I was by him as one brought up with him." With this agree the whole tone and import of Scripture in every part. It was the same claim which Christ asserted in his farewell charge to his followers: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." The most pertinent and complete statement of it is that which we have in Colossians: "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; *all things were created by him and for him; and he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church.*"

Then, if in this sense he be the Lord and Ruler of all creatures, we can easily understand the pertinency of the title to this special message. This is the explanation of his intense interest in that people, and the reason of his solicitude that they should fulfill the mission to which he had appointed them as their ordained Head. In his capacity as their Head, not only had he the prerogative, but the authority and the power also to rebuke, direct, and reward and chasten them. He could dispose of them, as of all things else, according to his own will. It was his prerogative to look into their condition, and to correct and command. His own glory was at stake in what they were as his creatures and under his direction.

The entire title of the Son of man, as it is in this message now lies before us in its three constituent elements, and we are able to estimate them in their separate signification, in their relations to each other, and in their united appropriateness to that which is the object of this communication from the throne. Together they present us with one most sublime characteristic of Him who is the Lord of this and of all other worlds. As the *Amen*, all his words to this people are true, and reliable, and absolutely without shadow of turning. As the faithful *Witness*, he is competent to testify as to their sad condition and the effects that must fol-

low their continuance therein; and it is his supreme prerogative to direct them in all their interests. As the supreme Lord of the world it was his to command, to direct, as his own infinite and righteous wisdom might prompt.

8. REBUKE.

Because the peculiar state of this church is that which forms the burden of the whole message; because of the exceptional severity of the rebukes which are administered to it, and because of the very important practical points for all times and places which are involved in it, we shall dwell more fully on this than on any other portion of the passage. The entire condition of the church, in its worldliness and sinfulness and wretchedness, lay open clearly before the eyes of our Lord, and he exposes it all. He lays it open before their eyes, in these emphatic words: "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would thou wert either cold or hot."

"Thou art neither cold nor hot." It is not difficult to conceive what the character of such a people must have been. They were not pagans, either in their own esteem or that of others. They were not infidels. They were professedly believers in Christ. They were members of the Church. They were attendants on at least a part of the ordinances on the Lord's day. They had not cowardly given up their Christian name or faith. But all this was with them little more than a mere name. They had no zeal either for their own salvation or that of others around them. You would not have found anything in them to distinguish them from their heathen neighbors, excepting the name and some little forms. They were not ready to make any sort of sacrifice for the cause of Christ. In cases where the interests of the world and those of the gospel were antagonistic, they would be likely to give Christ and his cause the cold shoulder. The sad description is that they were "neither cold nor hot." They claimed that they were Christians, but they were practically indifferent to everything that was characteristic of that profession; they cared nothing, in act, about the soul or eternity, or any of their most solemn interests. They were not interested enough in religion to give any earnest heed to the subject.

A very graphic description of what must have been their condition is given by an eminent author: "There was not one word of approval; it was lukewarm without exception, and therefore it was wholly loathed. The religion of Jesus had become to

them as an ordinary matter. They would attend to it just as they would to other things. The sacrifice of the Son of God upon the cross was nothing thought of more than a common gift by man. They were not constrained by the love of Christ more than by other feelings. They could repeat the words of the first great commandment of the law, and of the second that is like unto it; but they showed no sign that the one or the other was truly a law to them. There was no Dorcas among them who, out of pure Christian love, made clothes for the poor. There was no Philemon to whom it could be said, 'The church in thy house,' and who could look on a Christian servant as a 'brother beloved.' There was no servant who looked to the eye of his Father in heaven more than to that of his master on earth, and to the recompense of eternal reward more than to the hireling wages of a day, and who by showing all good fidelity sought to adorn the doctrine of God his Saviour in all things. There was nothing done as everything should be—heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men. They neither felt nor lived as if they knew that whatsoever is not of faith is sin. Their lukewarmness was worse, for it rendered their state more hopeless, than if they had been cold. For sooner would a man in Sardis have felt that the chill of death was upon him, and have cried out for life, and called to the physician, than would a man of Laodicea, who could calmly count his even pulse, and think his life secure, while death was preying on his vitals."

It would be hard for us to exaggerate the grossness of the sin, in the sight of God, of such a state of indifference to the infinitely momentous interests of eternity. Some of the ingredients of that guilt by which our Lord is wounded in the house of his friends we can readily imagine when we consider the ingratitude that forgets all that God has already done for us; the disobedience to Christ's gracious command, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness;" the humiliating fact that the world is preferred to its Creator, who is almighty, all-gracious, and infinitely benevolent; that the Most High is thus grossly insulted, and, alas! worst of all, that the Son of God is thus trodden under foot, and the blood of the covenant wherewith we are sanctified is counted an unholy thing, and despite done to the Spirit of grace. Without controversy, such lukewarmness is an insult and a crime to our glorified Lord before whom the angels bow; an insult, as if he were not worthy of our earnest thought and adoring worship.

He who laid down his life to save us feels it deeply, as we cannot but see from his sad complaint, "*I would thou wert cold or hot.*" These are strange words to come from the lips of Him who is the Truth, and who never speaks otherwise than in the language of truth and soberness. It was not exaggeration, or hyberbole, or a mere rhetorical stretch; but the simple fact as it lay before his unerring mind. We might have judged otherwise; we might have supposed that it were better to have a little heat than to be absolutely cold; to have even a feeble love than none whatever; but the heart-searching Lord pronounces otherwise. His declaration is that there is more hope for the man who is utterly untouched by grace than for the one who has professed to receive that grace, and has been warmed for a little while, but has become indifferent, and finally lapsed into a worse life than before. If it were a lukewarmness arising out of the progress of the soul up out of absolute darkness into the true light, then it would be well: but the progress from life down to death—then lukewarmness is an awful state that is truly deplorable! There is some hope of the as yet absolutely impenitent; they may yet obey the touch of the Spirit of God, and arise to a glorious life; but what of those who are growing colder and colder?

Look at the influence of such lukewarmness on its victim. He has enough of the appearance of religion to lull him into a state of torpor. He has as much of the name as to form a salvo to his conscience. You may then ply him with all the most attractive motives of the gospel; but, "Lo! thou art unto him as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument; for he hears thy words, but he does them not." It is with him as with the one described by Christ: "Then goeth he, and taketh with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there, and the last state of that man is worse than the first."

Thus evil is this lukewarm state to him who is under its influence; and who shall describe the injury which the example does to the impenitent world around him? It does far more harm than can be done by those who have never made any profession of being under religious impressions. Through its blighting example it says to the irreligious world: "I have tried all that there is in religion; I have professed it, and I have claimed all its excellencies, and I know for myself that it is all nothing but pretense." Its practical effect is to teach men

that religion is a lie, and the hopes offered by the gospel a delusion. Than this there is nothing more effectual in keeping the impenitent from coming to Christ and seeking his offered salvation. No community is so utterly impervious to gospel influences, none where religion is so sure to be bitterly and persistently opposed, none where the servants of God will so surely labor in vain, as where the withering influences of lukewarmness have settled down like an impenetrable pall. It is as the inspired description: "He shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched place in the wilderness, in a salt land, and not inhabited." Witness any community within our knowledge over which pestiferous errors have swept their blighting path, or witness the intense and never-relaxing opposition of the Jews to the cause when Christ and his apostles labored among them.

Need we wonder that our Lord expressed his detestation of such a state among any of his professed people in such strong terms? His words concerning it are more indicative of utter abhorrence than are any others which we can recall in Scripture. It is a state which is hateful, disgusting, nauseous in his sight. Could any language be more expressive of utter loathing? "Because thou art neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." He turns away from it as too offensive to be even striven with—"Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone." The description by the learned Adam Clarke, strong as it is, is yet not too strong: "'Thou art neither cold nor hot.' Ye are neither heathens nor Christians—neither good nor evil—neither led away by false doctrine, nor thoroughly addicted to that which is true. They seemed to care little whether heathenism or Christianity prevailed. Be either cold or hot. Be decided. Adopt some part or other, and be in earnest in your attachment to it. If ever the words of the gospel sonnet were true, they were of this Church:

> 'To good and evil equal bent,
> I'm both a devil and a saint.'

They were too good to go to hell, too bad to go to heaven. Like Ephraim and Judah: 'O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it passeth away.' They had good dispositions which were captivated by evil ones, and they had evil dispositions which in their turn yielded to those

that were good; and the divine justice and mercy seem puzzled to know what to do to or with them."

As a rebuke and warning, the expression, "I would thou wert cold or hot," is so very remarkable that we are anxious to press it home, and so use a few sentences of Dean Trench to aid in so doing: "It is as though he had said: I would thou wouldst take one side or other, be avowedly with me or avowedly against me, ranged under my banner or under that of my enemies, that so I might understand how to deal with thee. . . . . How shall we understand this exclamation of the Saviour? But, I think, in this way: namely, by regarding the *cold* as one hitherto untouched by the powers of grace. There is always hope of such a one, that, when he does come under those powers, he may become a zealous and earnest Christian. He is not one on whom the grand experiment of the gospel has been tried and failed. But the *lukewarm* is one who has tasted of the good gift and of the powers of the world to come—who has been, 'in some measure,' a subject of divine grace, but in whom that grace has failed to kindle more than a feeble spark. The publicans and harlots were *cold*, the apostles *hot*. The scribes and Pharisees, such among them as that Simon in whose house the Lord sat and spake the parable of the fifty and the five hundred pence, they were *lukewarm*. It was from among the *cold*, and not the *lukewarm*, that he drew recruits; from among them came forward the candidates for discipleship and apostleship and the crown of life: Matthew and Zacchæus, and the Magdalene, and the woman that had been a sinner, and all those others, publicans and harlots, that entered into the kingdom of heaven while the scribes and Pharisees continued without. That woman who was a sinner, for example, having been *cold*, passed from that coldness to the fervency of a divine heat at which there is little or no likehood that the lukewarm Simon ever arrived."

### 9. CENTRAL POINT.

The centre and substance of this seventh message from the throne of God is contained in the charge against the church: "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot." This would seem to be but a repetition of that which forms the subject of the previous section as the divine rebuke of that people. It is in reality such; but at the same time it may also serve to bring out that which is the great object of the message, to make their censure the more emphatic, to give their condemnation in God's own words, and to

make the *misery* of a lukewarm state the more conspicuous—for we have thus far dwelt chiefly on its sinfulness.

It is not to be overlooked that the censure upon this church is more severe than that of any other. This is surely significant. We cannot but see that it points forward to an evil that would perpetually beset the church; an evil which is afflicting her in a pre-eminent degree at this present day. The cause of the evil in the days of the messages was lukewarmness—the curse of the church at the present day is lukewarmness. And oh, what an evil it must be!—made by our exalted Lord the very burden of a special message from his heavenly throne; described by him under the strongest epithets—wretched, and miserable, and poor and blind, and naked; and branded by him as so loathsome in his sight that he will spue it out of his mouth.

It is to be very specially noticed that the lukewarmness of this church resulted from its people being possessed of great wealth. That is the undoubted inference to be drawn from the language that is made use of: "*Because* thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked?" There cannot be a question that many of them were of the wealthier class of the community. That such was the fact we may justly infer, among other such passages, from the charge given to Timothy, who labored in that region: "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy." The place being a great money exchange, and having so much commerce and so many manufacturing interests, would account for this. Moreover the money-making Jews who constituted such an important element of the population would naturally furnish many members to that early church. The possession of wealth would, with them, have the usual result in leading off their minds and engrossing them with the world, to their great spiritual harm.

This is the message of the seven which is pre-eminently applicable to the church of the present time. We here introduce a few most appropriate sentences from the pen of Albert Barnes: "There is no doubt that there was much wealth in Laodicea, and that, as a people, they prided themselves on their riches. . . . . Is it not true that they who have much of this world's goods, when they make a profession of religion, are very apt to suppose that they are well off in everything, and to feel self-complacent and

happy? And is not the possession of much wealth by an individual Christian, or a Christian church, likely to produce just the lukewarmness which it is said existed in the church of Laodicea? If we thus understand it, there will be an accordance with the well-known fact that Laodicea was distinguished for its riches, and at the same time with another fact, so common as to be almost universal, that the possession of great wealth tends to make a professed Christian self-complacent and satisfied in every respect—to make him feel that although he may not have much religion, yet he is on the whole well off; and to produce in his religion a state of just such lukewarmness as our Lord here says was loathsome and odious. . . . . 'And have need of nothing.' Still an emphatic and intensive way of saying that they were rich. In all respects their wants were satisfied; they had enough of everything. They felt, therefore, no stimulus to effort; they sat down in contentment, self-complacency, and indifference. It is almost unavoidable that those who are rich in this world's goods should feel that they have need of nothing. There is no more common illusion among men than the feeling that if one has wealth he has everything; that there is no want of his nature which cannot be satisfied with that; and that he may now sit down in contentment and ease. Hence the almost universal desire to be rich; hence the common feeling among those who are rich that there is no occasion for solicitude or care for anything else."

These professed Christians of Laodicea whom God so severely rebukes imagined themselves to be in a most enviable condition because they were rich and independent and prosperous in the world; but God pronounces a far different judgment concerning them. His verdict is that they were most wretched—wretched beyond all others because of their lukewarmness in religion. He further declares of them that they are the wretched ones through the effects of their riches. His language importing this sad fact is extremely significant: *Because* thou sayest, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing," and knowest not that thou art wretched and miserable! We must remember that this is God's estimation, and that therefore it is true and solemn. Their condition, according to the divine testimony, was deplorable. We can think of no other in all Scripture concerning which such strangely emphatic language is used. No less than five distinct terms are found by which their shocking state is portrayed—wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. Such words are not uttered in vain by the lips of infinite

truth and mercy, nor is one of them used without its own dread significance.

(1) *Wretched!* The wretched one—the one that is wretched in comparison with all others. This must be weighed in contrast with their own estimate of what they were: "Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." (2) *Miserable!* Not only wretched in themselves, but in such a plight as was calculated to excite the commiseration of others. Their state was pitiable; no one could see and understand their condition without pitying them. It was so in the sight of God, who beheld it in all its relations; and in the sight of all holy and tender creatures. (3) *Poor!* Poor, notwithstanding they imagined themselves so rich! Poor! poor! was God's verdict, who alone knows what are the true riches. They were chiefly poor because they boasted that they were so rich. How poor they were in all things that would meet the real wants of their nature! how poor when the inevitable calamities of life would come crushing upon them! how utterly destitute when upon a death-bed, and trembling upon the brink of an awful eternity! (4) *Blind!* So blind that they did not know their wretchedness: "and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." They were so blind and ignorant that they did not know their awful condition; so blind that they had no just views of sin, of God and their relations to him, or of their binding duties, of the solemnity of eternal things, or of their own impending dangers; so blind that they understood nothing of their highest interests, or of anything which it was of the greatest importance they should know. This was the worst conceivable blindness. Better had it been for them, a thousand-fold, had they been born blind and only understood the transcendent value of their own souls. (5) *Naked!* No righteousness of Christ; no wedding garment to put on; nothing to cover their sin and shame, to protect from cold and storm, to adorn their poor souls. "There may be gorgeous robes of adorning, and yet real nakedness. With all the decorations that wealth can impart, there may be a nakedness of the soul as real as that of the body would be if, without a rag to cover it, it were exposed to cold and storm and shame. The soul destitute of the robes of salvation is in a worse condition than the body without raiment: for how can it bear the storms of wrath that shall beat upon it for ever, and the shame of its exposure in the last dread day?"

Such was the unspeakably wretched state of this church in the sight of God—who never forms a wrong judgment. To warn it of this, and to arouse its members to a sense of their misery, was the great design of this message. This was the centre around which all else was arranged—the great burden of all. Titles of the Son of man, rebukes, counsels, threatenings, promises—all were intended to force them out from a state of sin and danger that was truly appalling.

10. COUNSELS.

Wretched, loathsome, as was the condition of this church in his sight, yet her merciful Lord would not give her up without one more effort to rescue her from the doom that must follow. He counsels her in the most gracious manner to awake to a sense of her sin and danger. The advice he gave was that of infallible wisdom, and would be invaluable to her, as it would also be to all other churches that might in after-time lapse into a similar lamentable plight. We can see the benevolence of his heart in that he exhorts rather than commands. He counsels as a friend rather than commands as a sovereign. He appeals to his wretched churches, and all his words are counsels, invitations, promises, rather than mandates. Not an irritating word does he utter. Five distinct appeals does he make, each fraught with wisdom and tenderness and fatherly consideration. His earnest entreaties are: Be zealous! Repent! Buy of me—buy gold tried in the fire: buy white raiment! Anoint thine eyes with eyesalve.

"*Be zealous!*" The root evil of this church was its lukewarmness, its indifference, its want of zeal, its utter destitution of all earnestness. Most fittingly, therefore, is it first called upon to awake to appropriate zeal in that cause which infinitely transcends all others in importance. The first step was to awake from its fatal torpor, and to become thoroughly in earnest. Indifference must be laid aside, and that at once, or they were lost.

"*Repent!*" Their wretched state of lukewarmness must be realized, acknowledged, and abandoned with shame and sorrow. The enormity of their sin and danger they must look in the face. The sight of their situation in all its appalling nature was enough to stir their souls to their very depths. As a church they were guilty in the sight of God—guilty of sins of a very deep dye because committed in the house of his friends, and because they were trifling with the immortal interests of their souls. A strange fascination was upon them that they

could be guilty of such folly. Hence, at once must they fall in the dust before God, and cry for mercy, and, with all the intensity of their being, turn away from their causeless infatuation. As if they had never experienced any renewal of their nature, and just as they did at first, they must come to the blood of atonement by which alone could they be saved. So must they repent as they did at the beginning; and so must it be with every other lukewarm soul, of any church or place or time.

"*Buy of Me.*" This exhortation was given to a trading community, and the language used was that with which, as merchants, they were most familiar. They boasted that they were rich and increased with goods; and they were therefore advised to purchase that of which God saw they were in the greatest need. Perhaps there was a little irony in these words, or perhaps it was intended to lead them to see of how little real value their wealth could be to them. They were rich—then let them buy. The first attempt they made would show that all they relied on was really worthless. They must buy of God: "Buy of me!" is the charge given to them. The awakened soul, in order to find satisfaction, must deal with Christ directly; for he, and he alone, can furnish that of which it is in the most crying need. "Buy of me!" is his call to those who have been brought to feel their poverty and wretchedness. "Buy of me!" in his cordial invitation; for in him "are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Such riches as the soul needs can be found nowhere else but in him. Through him alone can they be reached.

"Buy of me!"—but how could those Laodiceans buy, who were so poor, and blind, and naked? What price had they to give? The answer comes from the old prophecy of many ages before: "Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price! Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which satisfieth not? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good and let your soul delight itself in fatness." They had neither gold nor silver nor gems which he would value; but they might accept what he would give them freely. There is a price which even beggars could give, and which God even asks from them. That price is the renunciation of all vain reliance upon their own righteousness, and their own devices. It was the price which

Paul had willingly paid, as declared in the well-known words: "What things were gain to me, these I counted but loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ." This, and this alone, the penitent soul can give; but this involves the giving of himself, the yielding of his body, soul, and spirit, to be dealt with as his Lord shall see fit, if only he may receive the priceless treasure which he needs. And this price is rendered by the earnest striving after and longing for the gift—the reaching out after it, the opening of the mouth wide that he may fill it. More specially still, in this place, there is a distinct enunciation of the several things which must in this manner be bought from Christ—"gold tried in the fire," "white raiment," and "eyesalve."

"*Gold tried in the fire.*" Gold pure and bright from the furnace—gold that had been assayed and proved to be genuine, was that which they must have. They to whom this was addressed, of that money-dealing city, could appreciate the significance of this figure. They imagined themselves to be rich through their gold; but God declared that such merely earthly treasure was worthless in his sight. "They took," says Plumptre, "'the unrighteous mammon' not only as a substitute for the 'true riches,' but almost as an evidence that they possessed them. Outward ease and comfort took the place of inward peace: prosperity was thought a sure sign of divine approval. We cannot read the history of the Church of Christ, or look around us, or retrace our own experience, without feeling that it has been so, both with churches and individual men. Lethargy creeps over them; love is no longer active; material success, multiplied endowments, the power of giving money as the one embodiment of love to God and man—these have been the precursors of decline and of decay. On the larger scale it has been found hard to rouse to energetic spiritual action a church that was threatened with no dangers, resting on an arm of flesh, secure in the State's support. On the smaller it is equally hard to convince a respectable and well-to-do Christian that he can be wanting in the true wealth of love when he is ready, on occasion, to draw a cheque for a charitable institution." But the "tried gold" is that priceless faith which comes from God's Spirit alone and through which we can secure all the riches of grace. By such faith it is that we can obtain from the divine hand a bond that "All things are yours; whether Paul or Apollos, or Cephas,

or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come: all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's."

"*White raiment.*" This must be the righteousness of Christ that will cover the guilt and shame of all our sins, so that we can stand unabashed in the immediate presence of our God of infinite purity. Everything is significant here. The wretched church of Laodicea had been pronounced naked—naked in its shame and exposedness to cold and storm. Here was a covering which might be obtained by every one who would apply for it—buy it, strive for it, but without money and without price. This possession was one that was so indispensable that they should strive for it with all earnestness. It was a covering which, by God's appointment, would hide all shame and protect from all storms. It was an ornament that would be recognized and admired by every sainted eye in the realms of bliss. It would prove a wedding garment that would render the wearer a welcome guest at the marriage feast of the Lamb. It would be the glorious apparel that would distinguish all the ransomed around the White Throne. It was wrought out by the atonement of Christ, and for evermore would it mark all who should wear it as trophies of the most sublime achievement of the exalted Lord. Adorned with this, the faithful of Laodicea would be of a truth both rich and glorious, as would also all other believers, of every land and age.

"*Anoint thine eyes with eyesalve.*" In some respects, eyesalve was a requisite which they needed most of all. Sin had so obscured their spiritual vision that they could not see or understand their wretchedness. They could not discern their miserable condition, nor their crying need of spiritual supplies from the hand of God. They could not appreciate the divine detestation of their loathsome state, nor God's willingness to pardon and restore them if they only would be zealous and repent, nor the marvelous gifts with which he would then enrich them. They needed to have their spiritual vision rectified; and that could be done only by the enlightening power of the Holy Ghost. That was the spiritual eyesalve for which they were counseled to strive, and to secure at any price. Then would they be able to comprehend why it was that, whilst they were flattering themselves that they were rich and independent, they were in reality poor, and naked, and miserable.

Such was the admonition which God gave to this lukewarm church of Laodicea, and through it to all lukewarm souls of every church of every place and age. They must awake to intense earn-

estness, to repent, to strive for the riches of true faith, for the righteousness of Christ, and for the blessed illumination of the Holy Ghost. Then would they be truly rich and happy and blessed—blessed beyond imagination through their merciful Lord.

11. THE WARNING.

"I will spue thee out of my mouth." Such was the emblem of disgust, and such the significant warning. It told of loathing, and disgust, and utter rejection. As if the Lord were "vexed with their lukewarmness;" and, although he wished not so to do, must ultimately cast them out and drive them from him—as he did on another occasion when he cried: "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim?" Then this rejection of the lukewarm Laodiceans would be the more deplorable in that it would be of those who had been so near to him, shared in his special favor, and bore his beloved name. Very appropriate are the words of Dean Trench: "The land of Canaan is said to have *spued out* its former inhabitants for their abominable doings; the children of Israel are warned that they commit not the same sins, lest in like manner it *spue* them out; but this threatening is more terrible still: it is to be *spued out of the mouth of Christ*—to be rejected as with nausea, with moral loathing and disgust, by him; to exchange the greatest possible nearness to him for the remotest distance." This lukewarmness being continued in by them, they would as it were be thrown up, rejected with loathing, indignation, and utter repulsion.

Amid the surroundings of Laodicea, such threatening words would have an awful significance. The eminent writer and traveler Dr. Chandler depicts this, while standing on the very spot: "The hill of Laodicea, it is probable, was originally an eruption; for it consists of dry, impalpable soil, porous with small cavities, resembling the bore of a pipe, as may be seen on the sides which are bare. It resounded beneath our horses' feet. The stones are mostly masses of pebbles, or of gravel consolidated, and as light as pumice stone. We had occasion to dig, and found the earth as hard as any cement.

"It is an old observation that this country about the Meander, the soil being light and friable, and full of salts generating inflammable matter, was undermined by fire and water. Hence it abounded in hot springs, which, after passing underground from the reservoirs, appeared on the mountain or were found bubbling

up in the plain or in the mud of the river. Hence it was subject to frequent earthquakes. The nitrous vapor compressed in the cavities, and sublimed by heat or fermentation, bursting its prison with loud explosions, agitating the atmosphere and the earth and waters with a violence as extensive as destructive. And hence, moreover, the pestilential grottoes, which had subterranean communications with each other, derived their noisome effluvia; and, serving as smaller vents to those furnaces or hollows, were regarded as apertures of hell, as passages for deadly fumes rising up from the realms of Pluto. One or more of these mountains, perhaps, has burned; and it may be suspected that the surface of the country, Laodicea in particular, has in some places been formed from its own bowels." To a country such as this how awfully appropriate is the message of the Apocalypse: "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would thou wert either cold or hot; so then, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, *I will spue thee out of my mouth.*"

Most exactly and awfully was this menace accomplished in the ultimate doom of Laodicea. It is probable that for a time the church hearkened to the warning, repented and prospered; but the people must afterwards have lapsed again into their indifference until they were literally cast out, rejected, and their candlestick taken away from them for ever. The city and church were rejected, and became desolate. The desolations of the place where it once stood are now horrible. The visitor does not wish to remain amid its doleful ruins even for a single night. Strange is the connection of its present wretchedness with these words of doom. Says Emerson: "To Laodicea the most summary of the denunciations contained in the messages to the Apocalyptic churches is directed, namely, that of total subversion; and it has been awfully accomplished. The name of Christianity is forgotten, and the only sounds that disturb the silence of its desertion are the tones of the muezzin, whose voice from the distant village proclaims the ascending of Mohammed. Laodicea is even more solitary than Ephesus; for the latter has the prospect of the rolling sea, or of a whitening sail, to enliven its decay; while the former sits in widowed loneliness, its walls are grass-grown, its temples desolate, its very name has perished. A thunderstorm gathered on the mountains at a distance while we were examining the ruins of this city . . . . . We returned and waited until the fury of the storm had abated, but set off

on our journey again before it had entirely ceased to blow and to rain. We preferred hastening on, to a further delay in that melancholy spot, where everything whispered desolation, and where the very wind that swept impetuously through the valley sounded like the fiendish laugh of Time, exulting over the destruction of man and his proudest monuments." The city, rejected and desolate, cast out of God, and shunned as a disgusting thing by man, lies there, through the ages, as an awful witness of the unutterable doom of those who persist in a state of lukewarmness.

### 12. THE OVERCOMING.

The established formula in all the messages—"To him that overcometh"—in this case is easily understood, and is the more impressive because it stands alone. It is one definite thing, not confused with others and not to be mistaken. The single evil named as that with which the Laodicean church had to contend was indifference, or lukewarmness. They had no enemies from without with whom they were called to battle—they were not earnest enough in their Christian life to make any enemies. They had no errors among themselves which they needed to oppose—they did not care enough about their faith even to run into errors concerning it. The single thing they were called upon to do was to break away from their horrid, soul-destroying, God-insulting indifference.

That, however, was a task which it was extremely difficult to accomplish. Had it been a danger from without, they would have seen it and been forced to rise up in earnest opposition. If it had been even a suspected enemy, they would have been on their guard. But they did not see or apprehend any danger. They did not believe that there was any, and so they slept on in utter unconcern. They thought themselves all right and safe, and were fully contented as they were. They imagined themselves so independent in all their worldly concerns that they needed nothing, and had settled down in self-conceited ease; and so, on this very account, their danger had grown to be of the most imminent character.

At first sight, it might appear that the conquest which this church was required to achieve would be a very easy one. It was, however, the very hardest of all; and the reward promised to victory was that which would be the most glorious imaginable. All experience testifies that *self* is the hardest of all enemies

to conquer. That self must suffer sacrifice was the lesson which this church must learn at the very beginning. Self, with its invincible habits, its self-love, its self-indulgence, and its self-conceit, must all be attacked. How hard this is to do is not at first manifest, from the fact that this very indifference of the Laodicean church is the deplorable condition in which the great multitude of men are found. Wherever such lukewarmness exists, the needed motives and impulses are asleep. Feelings, habits, example of others—everything most cherished and longest indulged is against the merely making of the attempt. Hence, even to make a beginning requires an effort that would be almost desperate. Moreover, the tendency to procrastinate greatly increases the difficulty. Yet the desperate effort to break away from the blighting indifference must be made. There is no possibility of avoiding it. There is no other way to the victory. It is either the conquest of self, with its dearest, strongest and most inveterate habits and feelings; or sleep on, dream on, in wretched stupidity, until there comes the crash of some overwhelming chastisement, or the more awful doom of utter and contemptuous reprobation.

Yet, hard as it is for the spiritually lukewarm to repent, awake, and arise to new zeal, the effort need not be a hopeless one. The contest with indifference of soul would not be an absolutely desperate one. Even that dreadful enemy has been overcome by many; and what God has enabled others to do may surely be done again! It is a struggle to which, in his infinite truth and love, he would not have called his children, if there was no possibility of their success. If it were impossible, he would not have demanded it. Besides, it is a most blessed assurance of his, that he does himself stand ready to render his own omnipotence in aid. Without him the undertaking would be a desperate one; with him, obstacles would be nothing. It would be the gratification of his loving heart to aid the obedient striver; it would be his glory to crown with success. In this, as in everything else, we might triumphantly exclaim: "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

Moreover, the rapture of deliverance from the debasement of a lukewarm state would be more than a recompense for any toil and self-denial that the effort might require. Oh, to be free from that enslaving and degrading indifference! The anticipation of such joy is a motive that might be very urgently pressed. What a victory it would be to overcome self, the most

to be dreaded of all foes! The very hardness of the contest would add to the sweetness and the glory of victory. The joy of deliverance!—the rapture it would be to the soul that was not absolutely dead! Who shall describe the ecstasy of life and earnestness—especially in contrast with stupid lukewarmness?

Such is the overcoming to which this message calls, and to which its promise is made. It would be the victory of faith, and hence the most glorious achievement that heart can conceive. The emphasis which God himself lays on it shows how unspeakably great it must be. The greatest of all the promises is attached to it, and that is evidence that it would be the most sublime of triumphs *in his sight*, as it will also be in the sight of every creature that possesses any of God's Spirit.

### 13. THE LOCAL PROMISE.

It cannot but attract our attention and excite our surprise that this church, the most displeasing in God's sight of the seven, and to which there is not one word of praise, is the one to which the greatest of all the promises is made. This is so contrary to what we would have expected that there must have been some good reason for it. For the present it is sufficient to notice that all the promises are made to the overcoming in the churches, and that the faith which could live and conquer in such a blighting atmosphere as that of Laodicea must have been peculiarly praiseworthy in God's esteem. But still further than this, it is evident that there was a purpose to reveal the sympathy of our Lord, his tenderness and his long-suffering, by this message in a pre-eminent degree. This appears to have been a special design in it.

The condition of the church was one most offensive in God's sight, and he felt it most keenly. Its lukewarmness was odious to him; the more so that while both city and church had been specially favored, yet they had treated him with scornful indifference. Such indifference was worse than even open hostility, inasmuch as it contained the intolerable element of contempt. So abominable was this that the church must ultimately be cast out; so odious that it was warned that it would be rejected as an object of utter disgust. Yet, notwithstanding this, the doom was held back, as if God's mercy could not endure its infliction. In this respect the message had a peculiarity diverse from all the others. The lukewarmness condemned was a deplorable element that would be so common in all churches and ages that it is here made to stand out in contemptuous pre-eminence.

It is very significant indeed that the loving Lord seemed so reluctant to desert this church, or to let the inevitable sentence come down upon it. That he still rebukes, even when he had threatened, shows that he had not yet left his people, and that he could not bear so to do. The whole message shows how loath he was to give them up. The feeling is contained in his one tenderly expressed explanation: "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." He would not, could not, abandon his dear people, even of that loathsome church, until he had made one more effort to save them. In order to appreciate this, we must trace his efforts to reclaim the church and rescue it from the impending doom, before he would allow the dreadful blow to fall upon it. First, he threatens them with utter rejection if they would not repent: "I will spue thee out of my mouth." Then he counsels them, with infinite wisdom, what it was best for them to do—that is, that they should buy of him refined gold, white raiment, and healing eyesalve. Then he appeals to them in a pitying exhortation: "Be zealous, therefore, and repent." Then he explains to them that his language of apparent severity was not addressed to them in wrath, but in compassion for their wretched condition of indifference and danger: "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." Then he declares himself as determined to save them, if they only will be saved: "Behold, I stand at the door" of your hearts, unwilling to leave you. Then he does all that is at all likely to awaken them to a sense of their danger: he knocks. Then he offers to come back to them—to come in to them, if they will only open the door of their hearts to his overtures. Then he makes to them the crowning offer of full pardon and cordial reconciliation, in the figurative words: "I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." It is wonderful how anxious their compassionate Lord is to rescue them from the threatened doom. Before spuing out that loathsome church, he would try every expedient to reclaim them. A people so much beloved once, and, we must suppose, so loving in return, he could not bear to give up to such a horrid doom. He yearned over that church, once so dear to him, with the tenderest affection, and would not repudiate her, if it seemed possible that she could be saved.

How tender these words of his: "I stand at the door and knock" —knock repeatedly, and, we may suppose, the more earnestly as the moment for forbearance to end drew nearer. He does not merely stand waiting with diminishing hope, but makes use of the means that are most likely to affect and to rescue them. He knocks, first

using one method and then another, so that nothing might remain untried. Hence it is that arousing calls to churches are sometimes made by revivals and other favorable events. Sometimes he summons churches by allowing spiritual leanness to come upon them, and wretched strifes and divisions to prevail. Sometimes he knocks at the hearts of individuals by suffering alarming and painful accidents, and sickness, and sorrows and disappointments, and family and other troubles. Sometimes he would arouse by the gracious influences of the Holy Ghost on the ordinances of the sanctuary, and especially at the Lord's Supper. Sometimes his moving appeals are through some unusual impressions on the mind by which it is unexpectedly and deeply moved. The whole of this message, whenever read or heard, is such a sermon to whomsoever it may come.

Most appropriately has an earnest writer depicted this knocking of Christ: "By his word: pressed upon you in early childhood by Christian parents, friends, teachers, pastors; or, in later life, pondered in the solitude of your closet. By his providence: preserving life and health, or sending sickness; supplying every want, directing all your ways, protecting from danger, giving friends, and removing them—in each case for your good. By his Spirit: awakening, convicting, reproving, melting, leading others around you to repentance, pardon, and peace; convincing you that you have only to accept the proffered mercy to be blessed." The pious Rev. Henry Blunt has also presented the subject in these words: "Look back to that season, when, infancy and childhood over, you became a man and put away childish things: Christ was there again, in the mid-day of life, knocking, oh how loudly! by some warning providence, some awakening word, some providential recovery from illness, or some escape from danger, some spiritual conviction. Again he was refused admittance. And now it is evening with you; you cannot disguise the fact: morning, mid-day, afternoon are all past, and the lengthened shadows of evening will force themselves upon your observation. Yes, it is evening with you, and to-day he is once more there, beseeching you to admit him, by all the great and affecting truths that have been set before you; by the table spread for you, upon which you have so often turned your back; by his invitations sent to you, which you have so often disregarded; by his ministers pleading with you which you have so long neglected; nay, more, by his agony and bloody sweat, by his cross and passion, by his precious death and burial, by his glorious resurrection, he is this

day knocking for admittance—anxious, most anxious, that you should open to him, that he should come in to you, and sup with you, and you with him, before the night cometh, and he withdraws himself for ever, a slighted visitor, a rejected suitor, an insulted guest."

The same tender yearning of our Lord over his Church is touchingly expressed in the Canticles: "I sleep, but my heart waketh; it is the voice of my beloved that knocketh, saying, 'Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled; for my head is filled with dew, and my locks with the drops of the night.' 'I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?' . . . . . I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had withdrawn himself, and was gone; my soul failed when he spake; I sought him, but I could not find him; I called him, but he gave me no answer." This deep compassion of our loving Lord is ever the same—in the song of the royal poet, in the message of Patmos, and at the present hour! Undoubtedly the illustration here is taken from the Song of Solomon, and exactly sets forth Christ's mode of dealing with men. Not only does he wait for them; he comes to seek them. Instead of demanding that we should knock at his door, he knocks at ours. He searches for the straying sheep, and reverses the whole relation which we might have expected. He calls as well as knocks, that the sheep may hear his voice, and may know who it is that seeks admission to their hearts.

This is but one out of innumerable instances contained in the Sacred Book which allude to the indescribable affection and forbearance of our gracious Saviour. The thought burned in the heart of President Edwards, that greatest of American divines, and he thus wrote of it: "'Behold, I stand at the door, and knock.' Christ condescends not only to call you to him, but he comes to you; he comes to your door and there knocks. He might send an officer and seize you as a rebel and vile malefactor; but, instead of that, he comes and knocks at your door, and seeks that you would receive him into your home, as your Friend and Saviour. And he not only knocks at your door, but he stands there waiting, while you are backward and unwilling. And not only so, but he makes promises what he will do for you, if you will admit him—what privileges he will admit you to: he will sup with you, and you with him."

The object of such earnest appeal to the lukewarm Laodiceans was to get them to open the door of their hearts to receive him

as their reconciled friend. He wanted to secure their confidence in him as willing to pardon and forget their unworthy treatment of him. If they would only give their heart's confidence and affections to him, all would be well. What stood in the way? What was there which kept the door so firmly closed against him—and probably against him only? What consequently must be removed for his admittance? The world barred the door—that must be taken away. Self-conceit and pride barred the door—these must go. Sloth barred the door—that must be torn away, even though it should require a desperate struggle to do it. The greatest bar of all, however, was indifference, lukewarmness—it must go, or Christ would not, could not, come in. The whole heart must be opened to Jesus, if he would be admitted to rescue that soul that is in such imminent peril of utter rejection and ruin. He must be welcomed; for he will not force himself in, even though his infinite compassion is yearning over the soul that he would save.

More marvelous still it is that God not only offers to spare this wretched church, to pardon their loathsome indifference, and to avert the threatened doom, but shows himself willing to receive them back into the most cordial friendship. "I will sup with him," is the strong figurative Oriental expression he uses in making that offer. Even though they had lapsed into such guilty indifference toward him that they cared nothing about him or his offered mercy, yet would he overlook all, sink their loathed unconcern into oblivion, and receive them back with open arms. Though the miserable church had become disgustingly lukewarm, he would still receive back any of its penitent members, and deal with them as old and well-tried and trusted friends. Even though the church, as such, should give no heed to him, and add another and even worse insult, by ignoring this offer, if even a few of its members, or even one of them, would receive him, he would come in to that one; for he declares: "If *any man* hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him." This we regard as the most important practical point of all, and we would lay upon it the strongest emphasis.

"I will sup with him, and he with me." The offer is that of a feast, sealing the pardon and assuring of the most cordial friendship. "I will sup with him," in testimony that all his past offenses are blotted out and cast into the depths of oblivion. Not a word of reproach for his former base ingratitude will he hear; not a syllable of censure; nothing to bring a blush to his cheek because

of his ingratitude. "And he with me"—in evidence that his very heart and feelings are changed, and that his confidence in me is established. It will be a feast of unutterable joy over the perfect reconciliation, as their hearts shall thrill with the bliss of restored life and love. Oh that joy! who shall describe its rapture?

A beautiful thought concerning the scene suggested by this passage is contained in the excellent little volume on the messages by Professor Plumptre. We may "ask whether such a scene as that which this verse brings before us may not often have presented itself in John's (the writer) own actual experience? Think of the day's work over, the sick healed and the poor taught, and then the Master, after his manner, leaves the shouts of the crowd and the stir of the town, and withdraws into some solitary place to hold communion with his Father. Meantime the disciple is at home in his lonely chamber in the cottage at Bethsaida, or the lodging at Capernaum, watching, not sleeping, waiting for the return of Him in whose presence he found life; postponing till then the simple meal with which the day habitually closed. And then, as he watches, there is the distant sound of footfall; and then He, the expected Friend, stands at the door and knocks; and then the voice, so familiar in its gentle sweetness, tells him who it is; and then he rises, and the door is opened, and the Friend enters: the Son of man, who had not where to lay his head, finds shelter under his disciple's roof. He comes first as a guest, and sits down to sup with the disciple—who thus, as a host, receives him. But soon the places are changed, and he takes, as it were, the place that of right belongs to him. He blesses and breaks the bread and gives thanks over the cup of wine. He is now guest no longer, but host: the disciple sups with him." All is most graphic in this passage, all is blissful in the associations, and all is deeply significant: "The door is no sooner open, but Christ comes in and sups with the sinner. His *coming in* denotes our union to him; his *supping*, our communion with him—imperfect on earth, complete in heaven. There is a mutual, sweet, and intimate communion with Christ and believers here on earth. There will be a perfect, complete, and uninterrupted communion with him in heaven, when they shall ever be with the Lord."

This whole message is such an exhibition of the long-suffering of our blessed Lord as is hardly to be found in any other portion of Scripture. His pardoning mercy is so full and perfect that we

can hardly conceive how anything could go beyond it. The unspeakable compassion and forbearance of our gracious Lord is the heavenly thread which runs through and binds together every element of this precious message from the throne of God. Oh, what shall be thought or said to awaken our deeper attention to that which is the very life and soul of the message! In one comprehensive view let us survey the whole, and so strive for a more adequate impression of that gracious Lord with whom we have to do. Behold we, then, that fallen church as the wretched one, disgustingly indifferent, loathsome in God's sight, and so odious that a doom of utter reprobation hangs over it: the tender heart of the exalted Redeemer yearning over it with divine compassion, lingering, counseling, arguing, pleading to be admitted to its confidence, promising to spare it, if only he would be permitted to do so; and then describing the fullness of the pardon he would grant, the joy of the fellowship that would follow, and the feast of immortal blessedness they would then enjoy, even with himself as Friend and Guest. More than this could not be said or done.

14. GENERAL PROMISE.

"To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne." This is the final and grandest promise of the seven. Its words are weighty and suggestive. It is the last of the seven general promises; and as the apocalypse of celestial things draws to a close its words grow more and more solemn. Not only is it the last of the seven promises, but it is also so constructed as to embody in itself the substance of all the rest. In it the climax of God's engagements to his Church, had in view from the first, is reached in a sublimity the elements of which are gathered from them all. "Step by step the promises have advanced until a height is reached than which no higher can be conceived." Higher than this the imagination of man cannot soar. Says Tristram: "We have here the crowning triumph beyond which there can be nothing further of dignity or of blessing, for the summit has been reached—the very presence of Him who sits upon the throne; not only within reach of him at all times, but as it were, leaning on his breast." "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne."

Marvelous indeed it is that this highest and most sublime promise is made to the worst church of the seven. It was the most worthless and ignoble of them all. It was contemptible

as compared with all that was pure and exalted. In God's eyes it was absolutely loathsome—so that, as it then was, it could no longer be tolerated. Yet this degraded and contemptible church was the one to which the most exalted promise was solemnly engaged.

To maintain an earnest Christian life in the midst of such a blighting atmosphere as that of lukewarm Laodicea must have been a praiseworthy thing in the sight of a loving God. To have heeded the summons of the ascended Redeemer, acknowledged the obligations to divine grace, and broken away from the pestiferous influences of this abode of spiritual indifference was to manifest a state of soul which, we may easily understand, would bring down the divine blessing. Hence the pre-eminently rich promise was made to the spiritual heroes of Laodicea. Moreover, we can easily see how such sublime engagements to a people who had fallen so low must have magnified the grace of Him from whom they came. From none but the God of pardons could such peerless mercy have issued.

To such believing and penitent souls of the lukewarm church as would thus listen to the heavenly call would the Lord of the kingdom *grant* to sit down with him in his throne. The word grant—or *give*, rather—is not used here simply because it happens to be a convenient one, but because there is profound significance in its use, as there is in every other word in the connection. He would not enrich them with this surpassingly great blessing as a reward for their obedience and sacrifices. He would bestow it on them as a free gift. The blessings promised were of such infinite value that no creature, nor all creatures put together, had any price that was sufficient to pay for them. Nothing that creatures could give or do would enrich God. No price, merits, or penances could be received by him as equivalents. It is blasphemous as well as absurd to suppose that we can *do* anything to make the Lord of all worlds our debtor. This highest of all blessings will our Lord *give* to the beloved objects of his grace, as the best conceivable way of making known the infinite value of the sufferings he endured in our stead.

"*Sit* with Me in my throne." Every word here is golden, and we can touch but the outward borders of the infinite glory that is involved. We may conceive of the rapture of that moment when the saint—all sinning, suffering, trials and doubts being over—shall enter into the realization of the bliss of the place which our Lord has prepared for all of his followers. He

shall *sit*—no longer in the posture of waiting and hoping, but in the full recognization that he is at home in heaven. He is in heaven, to go out no more, but "sits down" in his home for the everlasting ages. He is permitted to sit down as a trophy of his Lord's redeeming work, while millions upon millions even of the holy ones stand around the celestial King. With no doubting or shamefacedness does he take up his abode there; for his right thereto is by inheritance secured through his all-worthy and all-prevalent Friend and Redeemer.

We cannot but feel amazed and staggered at appropriating to ourselves the divine words, "Sit down *with Me*, in *my* throne." What sublime mystery is there in these words? It is the Son of man who speaks—and says, "my throne!" Sit down on his throne! become sharers of his own peculiar glory! The saints "are, in some sense which we cannot as yet fathom, made 'partakers of the divine nature,' sharers in the holiness, the wisdom, and the love, and therefore in the glory and the majesty which have been from everlasting." Amazing is the thought! Take a seat on his throne—the centre of celestial glory; exalted to the place of supreme honor, and glory, and dominion—with him—as monuments to be seen by every celestial eye! We dare not attempt to fathom the transcendent mystery of that "with Me, in my throne," and that the more as we reflect on the unfathomable depths of his mediatorial glory depicted by the inspired pen—"which he (the Father) wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be Head over all things to the Church." Such is the supreme throne to a place in which, in this promise, he engages to raise his faithful followers and share with them.

That supreme *throne*, of which our Lord speaks here as elsewhere: where is it? and what is it? Concerning this, at most we receive but hints and far-away glances. Perhaps we could not understand, if more were revealed. What especially does he here mean when he first speaks of his own, and then of his Father's throne? Are they different, or are they the same, only covered with special lustre as the reward of his mediatorial achievement? Is this one, first promised, *his mediatorial throne?* We can only wonder, adore, and wait. What we do know with

certainty is that his throne is the centre and symbol of his majesty, his glory, his power, and his dominion, and of his eternal felicity. That throne is his by purchase, by covenant, and by everlasting decree of the adorable Godhead. It is the centre of his glory, the home of the unfallen as well as of the ransomed myriads who for ever and for ever bow before him. This we know distinctly; but all else is so much enveloped in the glory which no eye can penetrate, that it would be presumption for us to attempt to draw any nearer.

There is, however, one mystery covering this Messianic throne, upon which it is our privilege to gaze. It is the mystery alluded to in this connection: "even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne." In some sublime way this Messianic throne of the Son of God is the result, or reward, of his conquest over sin and death and the prince of the powers of this world. How or why this was, we would not ask; but the fact we receive, and would allow it to lead us into the contemplation of new mysteries. It was a most important and sublime event amid the divine counsels, inasmuch as our Lord very often, as here, alludes to it. It was to be the great comfort of the Church; for our Lord, amid his parting words to his followers, cheers them with it: "In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

That throne is evermore exalted before the universe as the great reward to Christ given to him in recompense for the humiliation of Calvary. First that humiliation is depicted in the passage ending: "and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Then follows the sublimity of his recompense: "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." From this we see that Christ, after his sublime achievement of triumphing over all evil, and rescuing the lost race of mankind, was exalted, in consequence thereof, to a seat of supreme glory on the Father's throne. This was the throne of the Godhead from eternity. We may not attempt to distinguish or describe these thrones; but we gather up glimpses caught here and there in other portions of the divine Word.

From these we see in this majestic object, the Great White

Throne—the very name of which has a heavenly charm—the seat of the Deity, around which all the potentates of glory assemble and bow in adoring reverence; the centre of the highest majesty, created or uncreated; the core of the brightest manifestations of the Godhead; the gathering-place of all the trophies of redemption from every land and age; the scene of the sublimest worship of angels and archangels, of cherubim and seraphim, and at the radiant footstool of which kneel the messengers who soar afar through the universe, bearing the mandates of the Supreme Ruler. It is the centre of all glory, and power, and dominion, and life celestial. Astronomy tells us of one central star in the midst of the celestial firmament, around which roll in sublime orbits all the myriads of the heavenly bodies, some of them requiring centuries to complete their circuits. How fit an illustration is this of God's central throne!—and who can tell but this central one of the starry worlds is of a truth the seat of that awful glory?

To a place on that throne the Son of man tells us he was exalted after his stupendous achievement on earth; and that according to his gracious purpose he will in like manner exalt the faithful in trials to his own Messianic throne. We wonder what this indescribable glory is to be. As we are now, we shall never be able to tell fully. Still, this much we do know: that as his sorely tried but faithful followers were identified with him in conflict and suffering, so also will they be in triumph—that as his exaltation was the more sublime because of previous trials, so also shall theirs be—that he intends them to be one with him both in humiliation and glory—that the ransomed conquerors shall have no blush of shame over the past as they take an honored place on the throne—that they also shall wear a crown of victory like that which shall be on his head—and that in all things they shall be like their adorable Lord.

This whole most wonderful promise having passed in review before us, we may now take a glance at it as a whole in order that we may obtain a deeper impression of its marvelously comprehensive character, as well as its unsearchable riches. We have said that not one word, or shade of thought, in it should be passed over carelessly: we can now see what this means. In this single verse, and that on its very surface, there are seven distinct items, on each of which a whole volume might be written. As a matter of deep and curious interest we may run these over in review. (1) This richest of Bible promises as to the future glory is to be

conferred by our exalted Lord as a gratuity, not as a reward or pay for services—"I will grant [*give* in the original] to sit with me in my throne." (2) It will be bestowed only on those who overcome in the earthly conflict: "To him that overcometh." (3) The conquerors will "sit down" in glory after the fatigues of the strife, and to stay there for evermore. (4) The place of this blessed reward will be *in* (not *on*) the Messianic throne—in the midst of it, as partakers of the glory, and power, and dominion. (5) This supreme and everlasting exaltation will be on a throne, emblematic of majesty, and glory, and dominion. (6) This throne will be Christ's own special, Messianic throne, enriched as the infinite reward of his humiliation on earth: "*My* throne." (7) All this will be after the pattern and in consequence of Christ's own conquest and session on the Father's everlasting throne of glory: "as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne."

Contemplate with adoring rapture the blissful future which this promise opens up to us after the present struggles with indifference and all other evils shall be over. All these things, now received on God's covenant engagement, are soon to be sublime realities. These words were uttered by the lips of our loving Lord of infinite truth. In the whole universe, what can be more firmly reliable than is this engagement to us of our dear Redeemer? After all that we have said, or read, or imagined, or can imagine, the reality will go infinitely beyond. It is said: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man to conceive, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." What is revealed to us is transporting in the very thought; but even all that is only the radiance of the glory the substance of which we cannot see as yet. Truthfully may we rejoice in the language of one of the most devout of modern commentators: "Only in such a loving heart as that of God could such a promise originate, and an eternity will be required to comprehend by slow degrees its full import. Then open the door wide, so that nothing may bar entrance within. And 'overcome.' The crown is a thousand-fold worthy of the struggle, and he who holds it forth stands with us."

### 15. THE CITY NOW.

In attempting to describe this old city and church as they are at the present time there is very little to be said, because the one sad characteristic of utter ruin and desolation absorbs all else. Ruins, and the ruined Turkish name, *Ladik*, are all that are found to iden-

tify it with the old city. Ladik, part of the old word Laodicea, is the name given by the Turks; but *Eski-Hissar*, or the "Old Castle" (probably from some old Moslem or Roman fortification) is the name which is generally applied to it. It is not now a town or even a smallest hamlet, but a mere wilderness of desolation; while about four miles from it there is a large village called Denizli. The region around is still an important wool-growing centre; and there are, even yet, noted warm baths in the neighborhood which attract visitors. These are all that give any modern importance to that wide waste of ruins lying up in the heart of the head-waters of the Meander.

These ruins, however, are what chiefly interest us in tracing the history of the place. Though they are spread over six or seven little hills for miles in every direction and cover acres of ground, there is not one Christian inhabitant to be found there; most deeply significant, there is not one human being of any kind who resides in the desolate spot. Wandering gypsies occasionally pitch their tents amid the desolations; a traveler sometimes visits it, and stone-cutters pass their days there at their work; but not one resident lives there. Eagles soar over it, foxes, wolves and jackals sneak through its hiding-places, snakes crawl amid its ruins, but no other living things make it their home. Stone-cutters work there through the day, but at night they return to their homes in the village of Denizli; for some strange superstition broods over the place which banishes them when the darkness settles down. Like the jackals they are instruments of destruction, for their business is to cut up and smash the blocks of splendid marble fragments that still remain, to shape them into gravestones, or search them for supposed enclosed treasure, or even turn them into lime.

The characteristic which pre-eminently marks the whole site where the city once stood is that of a wild confusion of ruins and debris. Among these it is not difficult to distinguish the remains of at least three vast theatres, of an immense amphitheatre capable of seating twenty-five thousand spectators, of odeons, gymnasiums, of a circus, and of other vast buildings. One class of ruins is the most conspicuous of all, namely, the vast lines of aqueducts, with arches sometimes whole and sometimes broken, which conveyed a water-supply from the surrounding mountains. These stupendous remains are the more noticeable from the fact that the local springs are impregnated with sulphur, and consequently pure water must have been brought to the city from a considerable distance.

It is easy for us to picture to ourselves the scene which so many intelligent and trustworthy travelers have described. We look around and behold a wilderness of ruins. On every side of us there is a dreary region of shapeless remains. Here are immense fragments of broken columns; here vast masses of beautiful cornices; here huge pieces of splendid capitals; and here enormous blocks of elegantly carved friezes—all of pure marble and all scattered in formless confusion. Says Dr. Hamilton: "The whole area of the ancient city is covered with ruined buildings." Says Emerson: "Interspersed with these are the vestiges of ruined walls, arches, inscribed slabs of stone, fallen columns, and sarcophagi, but not one perfect or very striking object meets the eye; all is alike desolate and decayed." Yonder you see the crumbling walls of a vast theatre or gymnasium; yonder the strong seats, almost perfect, of a demolished amphitheatre rising up row above row; and yonder, most massive of all, the stupendous arches of an aqueduct stretching far away to the mountain streams. On every hand can be traced the low hills, with the intervening valleys, on which the city was located; beyond them the depressed lines of the little rivers that formed its boundaries—the Lycus on the north, the Asopus on the east and south, and the Carpus on the west; and, beyond these again, the lofty mountain peaks that on all sides tower to the clouds and close up the horizon. It is itself a vast amphitheatre in the mountains including a stupendous labyrinth of ruins.

All travelers agree in describing the shocking melancholy which prevails over the whole scene. They tell us that the stillness is awful—as if death itself reigned over the mournful desolations; that the place is repulsive beyond description. No motion is witnessed save sometimes a soaring eagle, a stealthy fox, or the effects of the sweeping wind. Everything tends to depress the spirits and to produce a mournful sadness. Nothing attracts, but all is lonely and repulsive; and no man wants to stay there. The night, with its silence, its solitude and dreariness, and with the pall of superstition which then settles down, becomes utterly unbearable. No native of the region could possibly be persuaded to spend it there; even travelers, as the gloom begins to settle, hasten away to Denizli. In fact, it would almost seem, while we read their impressions, as if travelers vied with each other who could give the most doleful description of the forlorn place. Dr. Hamilton writes: "Nothing can exceed the desolation and

melancholy appearance of the site of Laodicea; no picturesque features in the nature of the ground on which it stands relieve the dull uniformity of its undulating and barren hills. From the pen of Prof. Tristram we have: "Such is Laodicea to-day—rejected and desolate, unvisited save by the riflers of tombs or the wandering gypsy. Its gray and scattered ruins present nothing to attract. We see it now shunned of man, and its crumbling heaps inhabited only by deadly serpents, the dread of the stranger who ventures to ramble among its ruins." They all agree that in the wretched place there is nothing to attract, but that all is deeply repulsive and melancholy, as if the doomed spot were utterly deserted of both God and man.

Without a question the ruin and desolation of this city of Laodicea are more complete and impressive than those of any other of the cities to which these messages were sent. Smyrna is still a large city, Pergamos and Thyatira and Philadelphia have each of them thousands of inhabitants, Ephesus has a few scattered hamlets, and Sardis has at least three or four residents, with its old mill; but Laodicea alone has not a single human being living amid its horrid solitude. And there is no physical or local cause for this. Its advantages for attracting at least a few inhabitants are greater than those of either Thyatira or Philadelphia, which are still important towns. It has most of the physical attractions which it ever had, and there are even now large villages, such as Denizli, in its near neighborhood; but it alone is a mere desolation.

Why is this? Why is the site of this church alone desolate, shunned, abhorred by all men? Can we help associating our answer with the warning words of the message: "I will spue thee out of my mouth"? Can we conceive of a more perfect, a more exact fulfillment than is presented by that forlorn spot where the city once stood? Had it been the one special purpose to leave a standing witness for all time of that doom and of its fulfillment, can we conceive of any method by which it could have been more awfully accomplished? Of course no real follower of Christ is foolish enough to argue that the curse of God would be simply impressed upon broken slabs of marble and crumbling walls. But is there no divine Providence that could, and likely would, make them his instruments? Is there no omnipotent power and undying watchfulness that could evermore continue to guard what infinite wisdom had written? Could not our sovereign Lord set up such monuments to be seen by both the Church and the world so long as time shall last?

16. PLACE IN THE BEACON.

It is to be expected that the last, highest, and most impressive warning of the great Beacon of the ages which God has erected for the Church and the world would be a warning of what would ever be their greatest danger. From this, very probably, if there was nothing else, we would infer that the cause of the ruin of the strong church of Laodicea was the chief evil against which all other churches, in all other places and times, should most earnestly strive. That evil of evils, warns our Beacon, let all churches the world over see, is lukewarmness, or religious indifference. It is also worthy of most earnest attention that this evil which God has stigmatized as the most dangerous of all evils to the cause of Christ, is looked upon by most professed Christians as scarcely any evil at all. This is the insidious fact which renders it so much to be dreaded. It is not the rock which towers up above the highest tide and so can be seen from afar that is the most fatal to seamen, but it is the reef hidden beneath the surface of the water, and the unseen quicksands that engulf the heedless mariners with their priceless cargoes. We are prone to consider that apparent and worldly prosperity in churches. is that which is most satisfactory; but we are here warned that these may be in fact the indication of the very worst condition. Satan lays his malign plans too deeply; and God, seeing beneath all delusions, admonishes only of the dangers which threaten the soul.

Contemplating this final element in the great Beacon in this light, we can see three important practical points of which it would warn the whole Christian world—namely, that freedom from spiritual enemies and opposition is not good for the Church; that pride, especially the pride of wealth, is most dangerous to the true interests of religion; and that lukewarm indifference is the greatest possible spiritual evil in a community.

(1) It is not a thing to be desired that there should be no spiritual enemies or opposition with which we shall be called to contend. The two worst churches of the seven were those of Sardis and Laodicea—the one having a name to live, but being in fact dead, and the other being neither hot nor cold. Yet these two churches were the only ones to which there were no enemies or opposition from without with which they were called to contend, so far as we are informed. This cannot but attract our attention, inasmuch as it is the very opposite to what we would

have expected. Nevertheless we can understand the reasons why it is so. Our interest in religion not being kept alive by efforts to defend it, we are in danger of lapsing into the opposite extreme of indifference. Not having any exertions to put forth in its defense, or sacrifices or self-denials to make for it, we are liable to lose our appreciation of its value. Through great tribulation we are to enter into the kingdom of heaven, and when the tribulation is not required, the progress upward is not likely to be very zealous. All experience confirms the deplorable fact of this tendency. It was the man who had nothing more to contend or exert himself for who flattered himself: "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years: take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." It is in highest love to his people and in care over them that our gracious Lord has established the rule that—"As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them on her wings," so he disturbs the rest of his people to train them for higher soarings. The periods of the Church's most rapid growth have generally been periods of persecution. Worldly prosperity is dangerous to the soul.

(2) Pride, especially the pride of wealth, is most perilous to the highest interests of the soul by producing a loathsome indifference to religion. The whole texture of this message makes this sadly emphatic. The connection of self-conceited egotism and wretched lukewarmness could not be made more evident. Worldly prosperity made the church proud, pride made it feel independent, felt independence made it indifferent to the claims of God and the soul. Christ's solemn warning, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of heaven," is worthy of far deeper attention than it has ever yet received. Beside it, there is another of his most faithful warnings: "He that exalteth himself shall be abased." Then, to such warning words there are here added warning acts. Most deeply significant it was that Sardis and Laodicea, the churches of the two richest cities, were those which were the poorest in God's esteem and that incurred the heaviest doom. The very heaviest hand of judgment was laid upon this church which was the richest and proudest of the seven.

(3) Lukewarmness was the awful evil that was here warned against; and from its own character, as well as from its position at the close, this element of the Beacon was intended to be the most admonitory of all. How much else in the warnings of the

divine Word there is of the same nature! How alarming the admonitions from heaven against the sin of indifference! The Lord's utter disgust with it was strongly expressed in these words: "As for you, O house of Israel, thus saith the Lord God: Go ye, serve ye every one his idols, and hereafter also, if ye will not hearken unto me; but pollute ye my holy name no more with your gifts, and with your idols." Can any thoughtful mind contemplate the state of the church at large at the present day without an alarming conviction that its great sin and danger are just such lukewarmness? Is not the prevalence of this evil at all times the reason of its having the sad pre-eminence of being the last and most solemn of all these warnings from heaven? Behold the awful desolations of that doomed city, and remember that they are the consequence of indifference! When such indifference prevails, what can be done? What can be done for such a church? What more can be said than that God loaths such lukewarmness? Men will not be in earnest about God and their souls: what can be done for them?

# CHAPTER XV.

## KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

We have now reached the third and last general department of our work—namely, that in which we are to gather up into a comprehensive form, and set forth distinctly, the great practical truths of instruction, guidance, encouragement, and warning which the great Head of the Church intended to convey to his people through these messages. These are what give the messages their practical value to the whole Church of God on earth. The form in which they are conveyed is calculated to impress them very deeply. We would attempt to present them in their own essential character, analyze and classify them, indicate their relations to each other and to the general subject, examine their full scope as covering the whole field of practical truth and duty, and strive to hold them up so conspicuously that they may accomplish their appointed design of serving as a *beacon* for all the churches so long as time shall endure.

Hitherto we have traced the character of each one of the churches separately. Now, however, we would adopt an altogether different classification. We have seen that in each separate message, with two slight exceptions, there are seven distinct points or elements presented. There are in each some title of the Son of man different from all the rest; an assertion of God's minute observation of their course and character; some defect in each (with two exceptions) which receives the divine censure; something in each (with one exception) which is specially approved; some heavenly counsel given; some threatening uttered in case of unfaithfulness, and some promise made to those who would overcome these peculiar trials. Our aim now will be to classify the messages according to these seven elements in each—that is, to take each one of them in succession, and trace it through all the messages. We shall devote a chapter to each of them as it is brought before us in its various aspects or shades of interpretation, through the whole body of the communications which the Lord has here made to the churches.

Following out this arrangement, we are first to collect, classify, and analyze the various titles which are given to the Son of God in the respective messages. These titles, or names, are all different from each other; each of them is adapted to the peculiar circumstances of the church with which it stands associated, and, as a body, they contain every essential element of the attributes of our exalted Lord. To trace these attributes as they are introduced into the messages is a work of great interest and importance.

This passage will not be rightfully comprehended, until we come to the distinct conception that it was uttered by our risen Lord just as he was taking the throne of his mediatorial kingdom. He had been on the battlefield with Satan and sin and death, and had conquered and rescued man from the power of the prince of darkness. He had returned to his heavenly glory, not to abandon the ransomed world, or leave unfinished the work which he had so triumphantly begun, but to complete it in a higher sphere. That work he was henceforward to carry on from the celestial throne. This fact he asserts in the proclamation to his church: "I am he that liveth, and was dead, and, behold, I am alive for evermore, amen; and have the keys of hell and of death." Just as he receives those keys, and is crowned with the mediatorial diadem, he issues his proclamation to those over whom he was about to reign gloriously.

He begins with an announcement of the office he was assuming, of his right thereto, his ordination to it, his authority and his qualifications, and of the principles according to which he would rule, and of the everlasting results of his administration. For this reason it is that the messages are introduced by reciting the various titles or attributes of the divine Ruler. Not only is there a list of such attributes, but each one named has reference to that supreme kingly dominion upon which he was then entering. This fact furnishes the key by which we are to interpret the various titles.

It is of prime necessity that we place these titles as found in the messages together, that they may be weighed and compared. Taking them in the order of the messages, we have—in that to Ephesus: "He that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks." To Smyrna: "The first and the last, which was dead, and is alive." To Pergamos: "He which hath the sharp sword with two edges." To Thyatira: "The Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass." To Sardis: "He

that hath the Seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars." To Philadelphia: "He that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth and no man shutteth, and shutteth and no man openeth." To Laodicea: "The Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God." Each of these is very brief and very significant, and when all are put together they display the glories of Christ the King with a marvelous fullness and show forth in a wonderful manner the extent and majesty of his power.

Let it be observed that these various emblems of Christ are not intended to depict the general glories of Christ, but those attributes which qualify him to conquer all enemies and to *reign supreme in Zion*. They are not a mere collection of his divine perfections taken promiscuously, through which to describe his infinite glory; but such an array of his attributes as justifies him in assuming the mediatorial authority, enables him to secure it, and qualifies him for its administration. Not one of these titles but has a bearing on that subject, and, most wonderful, not one of his attributes of which we have been instructed here but has a place in this list. This gives to their study a marvelous interest and significance. The most cursory review of them reveals his entering upon his mediatorial throne; his authority therefor as having been granted by council of the Godhead; his right to it as having come down from the everlasting ages; his chosen agents both for conquest and conducting the affairs of administration; the efficacious mode in which he will govern; the omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence through which he will subdue all enemies and rule over all friends; the exalted principles on which his administration shall be conducted; the stability of his dominion;—and the infallible certainty that all this shall be carried out according to the plan and promise of Him who was then about to be crowned the Kings of kings and Lords of lords. Such is the picture of our Lord's entrance upon his mediatorial dominion which is brought out to us by gathering into one view and properly classifying his various titles as contained in the messages; and that, too, whilst each one of them has its own special adaptation to the church with which it stands connected. We may have expected simply some appellation by which the glories of our exalted Lord would be impressively set forth; but besides that we have found a marvelous, appropriate, comprehensive, and even exhaustive index of his attributes as supreme Lord of the Church and the world. By examining all these in detail, we shall become con-

vinced of the reality and of the significance of this element of the messages.

In entering upon the study of these titles in detail, and also taking them in their totality, we are first led to glance at the occasion which called them forth, and the purpose, so far as we can gather it, which our Lord had in view in presenting them in such extraordinary array. Why were they all proclaimed? and why at this special point? The correct answer undoubtedly is that Christ was here entering upon his mediatorial dominion, and it was of vital importance that the world should know who he was, and how he would reign over that peculiar kingdom, then set up, and to endure for ever. There is an intimation of this in the message in which he is spoken of as he "which was dead, and is alive"—dead for the redemption of men, but alive to apply that redemption. More fully was this announced by our exalted Lord when first recognized by the rapt seer: "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, amen; and have the keys of hell and of death." He had come up from earth and the grave to take the throne of that everlasting kingdom which he had in view at every step of his humiliation. All that he had previously done on his mission to earth was to prepare the way for that kingdom, purchase it by his sufferings unto death, break away every barrier that could obstruct, open every door, and rescue from the dominion of Satan all those who were to become his subjects. This was now all over; and we read nothing of his earthly life and sufferings and death, because all were past—the victory won, the enemy subdued, and the new kingdom ready to be established. He stood at the centre of infinite power and authority for that purpose. He was taking the sceptre over the empire of the ransomed. Having upon earth purchased and prepared the kingdom, he was now shaping its glorious form, and taking its supreme throne. Hence this brilliant array of his titles was the inaugural by which he assumed his authority and outlined the principles according to which he would reign for evermore. The words were few; but they were comprehensive, almost exhaustive, of all that the Church needs to know, or as yet possibly can know. Such was the design of the titles of Christ introducing each of the messages: let us now see how fully they covered every point.

(1) *His right to the throne of the mediatorial kingdom, and his appointment thereto.* This is a point which was considered of so much importance that four of the fifteen titles in the messages

were devoted to it—namely, to Laodicea, "The beginning of the creation of God;" to Smyrna, "The first and the last;" to Thyatira, "The Son of God," to Philadelphia, "He that hath the key of David." It is appropriate that his divine right to that throne, and his ordination thereto, should have the first place in our Lord's great proclamation to the world. The claiming of this right and of this appointment is exceedingly significant in him who had no need to justify anything that he did before his creatures. By the exertion of his omnipotence simply he might have taken possession of the throne, and every mouth would have been closed. In condescension to us, however, he graciously stoops to justify what he does. He lays very great stress on this by adducing so many of his titles which bear on it. How can we sufficiently admire his so doing! How clearly he manifests thereby that "He knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust!"

In taking the throne of the mediatorial kingdom, he would not appear as a usurper, but stoops to show his credentials before men and angels. The first of these titles which we would consider is in the words: "*The Beginning of the Creation of God.*" He is the beginning, the principal, the head of all creatures; all creation is under him: "Of him, and through him, and to him are all things." All creatures are lying at his disposal, and he has the absolute right to exercise the fullest dominion over them for the welfare of his Church, as well as for the promotion of his own glory. As the principal of all creatures, it was his to rule over them as their supreme Lord.

"*The First and the Last*" was another title of somewhat similar import, which also gave him a right to claim supreme authority over all the creatures which had been formed by the divine hands. This claim to dominion over his ransomed Church was from the first, from everlasting, and would run on to everlasting. From the first to the last is his dominion. Before man was formed, before angel flew on heavenly message, before any creature existed, he dwelt in his ineffable glory. All other beings were created by him and for him. For his glory they were brought into existence, and by his omnipotent hand they have evermore been upheld. Then who but he should reign—who but he has right and power to reign—over them? Who but he shall hold the sceptre over any kingdom from among them which he might choose to appoint? All this is implied in that marvelous

title which he claims for himself and which no other being dares to claim—the First and the Last. First in time, first in power, first in dignity, who but he should reign? First and last, all is comprehended in him, and he must rule over all for the accomplishment of his immutable purposes formed in the depths of the ages part.

"*The Son of God*" is the third of his titles which our Lord advances as proof of his right to rule over this glorious kingdom. The appropriateness thereof is most evident. The infinite Jehovah, self-existent, supreme, the highest and most glorious of all beings, is Father. The whole universe is his, for it is all the work of his creative power, it is upheld and guided by his all-embracing providence, and his glory is that for which it all exists. Then of Christ, the destined king of Zion, it is affirmed that he is God's Son; his Son only-begotten and well-beloved. He is the Son of God in a sense inconceivably glorious, and which also constitutes him co-equal with the Father. Then is he also heir of the kingdom, and that by right the mystery of which we cannot penetrate. The throne is his by everlasting inheritance, and when he took it he took but what was his own. Being himself the true God, he has every perfection for ruling supremely and without defect.

Further still, the titles show not only that he has a right to this mediatorial kingdom, but also that he has actually been invested with that dominion, and of a truth ordained thereto in the councils of the Godhead. The words expressing such title are: "*He that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth.*" The established emblem of the kingdom of Christ was, in the Old Testament, Zion; and in the New Testament, the Church. But David, reigning in Zion in the days of its greatest glory, was the chosen type of Zion's King. Then the key of that kingdom was the expression used to denote the highest power of the kingly throne. To have the keys was to have the right or authority of reigning supreme. The "key of David" was the typical formula of headship in that kingdom. Moreover, the authority thus conferred was absolute and final; for it is added of him who had the key: "He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth." Such is the title here applied to our exalted Lord. It is only another form of the eternal decree ordaining him to the supreme authority over the Church of the ransomed; as, for instance, in the Second Psalm, where we have the change-

less purpose: "I will declare the decree" . . . . "I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion" . . . . "Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession." By the everlasting decree of the Godhead was he ordained to that mediatorial throne. The fact is also revealed that he was thus crowned as the reward of his humiliation and death for men. He had purchased the right to that throne by an awful price. In consequence of his death upon the cross it is written, "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Thus, therefore, is Christ's right to the kingdom clearly attested by the four titles we have reviewed—namely, "The First and the Last"—"The Son of God"—"He that hath the key of David"—"The Beginning of the Creation of God."

(2) *The forces through which he is able to subdue the enemies and conduct the administration of the kingdom.* He has a right to the throne and was ordained to it in the eternal decrees of the Church's divine Head; but through what instrumentality will he conquer and reign? Two of the titles in the messages were doubtless intended to answer that question. "He that holdeth the stars in his right hand" is one of them; "He who walketh in the midst of the golden candlesticks" is the other. These titles had other points of significance, no doubt, but it is in the array of the attributes of our Lord as the ordained King in Zion that they had their chief meaning and importance here.

Without question, the almighty Head of the Church might have conquered every enemy and established his kingdom through the simple exertion of his omnipotence; but, as in every other department of his government of the world, he has seen fit to carry on that work through created instruments. Then the language used to describe his operations is adapted to our power of comprehension. Accordingly human agents were needed to subdue opposition and to conduct the affairs of the kingdom after it had been set up. An army was requisite to conquer the enemies of Christ, and to guard the peace and order of the empire; and so, as his redeemed army, God established the Church, with the multitudes of its members and the resources of its powers. In the magnificence of its organization, and the

diversity of its branches, throughout the messages it is named "the golden candlesticks." In the midst of these, as if in the heart of their light, and life, and love, he is said to walk, and through them he is represented as exerting his omnipotence. He walks among them, as there putting forth his constant activity; as exerting a sleepless oversight of each soldier of the Cross and every movement of the forces: as conducting every effort to build up the sacred cause; and as the very life which pulsates out from him, and operates his own infinite energy. He walks in the midst of the churches in the aggregate of their hosts and agencies, in order to animate all, and protect them by his almighty power. By him each individual is cared for, and kept ready to hasten at any moment to the allotted post of duty. Every true soldier of the kingdom to be set up was under his eye, was trained by him for coming battles, had a post of duty ready for him to occupy, and was awaiting the word of command from the great Captain in the enterprise that was to rescue from Satan the empire of earth, and place upon its throne the Lord of glory. He walked in the midst of the ransomed through whom, as his army, he was both to subdue and to reign for evermore.

There were also under him officers appointed to lead the conquering armies, and to rule in the coming kingdom. Their character and titles we know from the sacred record: "For God hath set some in the Church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers; after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues." Concerning these, our message asserts the fact: "*And he had in his right hand seven stars.*" They are represented as in his right hand, because they are very dear to him; dear to him as the apple of his eye—so dear that he says of them: "Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm." These were the stars in the right hand of the Glorious One who walked in the midst of the golden candlesticks. There they were kept, as most precious in his sight; as those whom his omnipotence would guard from everything that could possibly do them any real harm; in his hand, all ready to spring to any duty which the emergencies of the noblest of enterprises might demand; in his hand, to be trained for activity in that struggle that was to rescue the lost race of mankind; in his right hand, as evidence of the honor he would put on them above all others of the sons of men. These stars held safely in his own right hand, and these golden candlesticks, in the midst of which

he ever moved in glorious majesty, were the forces prepared by the ascended King for final conquest, and for righteous administration.

(3) *His qualifications for reigning supreme in the ransomed kingdom of his Church.* These are distinctly made known by three of the titles in the messages—namely, "He which hath the sharp sword with the two edges;" "who hath eyes like unto a flame of fire;" "and his feet are like fine brass." Such are the established emblems in Scripture of God's omnipotence as exerted against all his enemies. His voice sounding out loud as the sound of many waters, and sweeping down all before it as a two-edged sword, is but the outgoing of the infinite power which lies behind it, and of which, to all creatures it is the awe-inspiring revelation. He speaks—his words are his will; in an instant that will is accomplished by means of his irresistible might. As with a two-edged sword his counsels cut into the heart, and must be obeyed. Sounding out through the world, they become its law. Creatures dare not resist what he decrees. All opposition is swept away by a word from his mouth. He is omnipotent, and must subdue. The most mighty enemies rage against him, earth's most potent kings assemble to plot against his authority, and to contrive deep-laid schemes: what can all accomplish? "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision." He holds them in contempt; but that is not all; he unsheaths the sword: "Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure." Such is the omnipotence of Him who in the messages is seen to take the throne.

A second of his qualifications is expressed in the title, "*His eyes were as a flame of fire.*" A knowledge from which nothing can lie hidden, and an infinite wisdom to lay the foundations of the government, are implied in this. His is a flaming eye that can sweep over all worlds and behold every creature and every action in an instant of time. In the deepest recesses of hearts there are neither feelings nor purposes that can be hidden from him. The plots of enemies and the motives that stimulate friends are all alike open before him. All human thoughts and undertakings and results lie clearly in his sight. Every spot of the whole battlefield of the world, with sin and evil on the one side, and truth and righteousness on the other, is as clearly seen by him as if he were present there in all the fullness of his glory. He has infinite skill to lay such profound plans as will thwart all

opposition and give success to every effort for the upbuilding of the kingdom. His wisdom for framing laws and ordering government is such that it never errs. To him there can be no surprises from enemies, and by him no mistakes can be made. Every quality needed for the leading of armies, or for framing the complicated machinery of government, is his in absolute perfection.

A third qualification for the throne he was henceforth to fill is implied in the title: "*And his feet are like fine brass.*" Translated into our ordinary power of comprehension, the word that will best serve us here is *celerity*—celerity of purpose and of action, a celerity that is in fact omnipresence. This is an attribute of our glorified Lord as the ordained sovereign of his Church and kingdom. Not only can he behold every point at which the work of that kingdom goes on, but with a rapidity quicker than the light can he be there in special presence. Swifter than the lightning does he fly throughout the universe. Instantly can he be at every point of the vast battlefield for the kingdom. With feet as bright as molten brass does he tread out all opposition wherever it may appear. Promptly does he break his enemies and shiver their weapons of war as does the potter a vessel of brittle clay. He can be present with all his people, in every one of their struggles—"a very present help in trouble." Wherever dangers threaten, wherever difficulties are to be overcome, wherever his church is to be built up, wherever his help is needed—there can he be with a look of cheer and a hand of might. All these may be figurative expressions: but they are all in condescension to our imperfection of understanding. They are graphic and tell impressively of the perfections of our Lord for that divine government to which he has been appointed.

(4) *Nature of the Kingdom.* Concerning this it is highly important that our views be in accordance with the divine mind. Accordingly, the comprehensive and significant titles leave us no uncertainty on the subject. "*He that hath the Seven Spirits of God,*" is the one description which in this case covers all. He hath the Seven Spirits of God—the Holy Ghost in all his fullness. Thus he reigns. His rule is spiritual; his kingdom is a spiritual one. Such, in this message, is Christ's name, and such the dominion upon which he was entering. The titles, already reviewed, inform us of our Lord's right to the kingdom, of the agents through whom he would conduct its affairs, and of his own qualifications therefor—it is meet that we should now consider precisely what it is in its own character.

This title implies that it is spiritual in its nature. Akin to this was the old prophetic description of many centuries previous: "This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, saying, Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." The kingdom over which our glorified Lord was to be crowned was one that would not be administered by force of arms, or by earthly power of any description, as were the empires of earth. It would be entirely spiritual in its nature and agencies. The method through which it would exert its power would be that vitality it would awaken in the hearts of men through the Holy Ghost. Such would it be, in the conquests it would achieve over all opposing forces, in the methods it would use in conducting its administration, and in the various services it would require from all its subjects. They would render their obedience because it would be the glad desire of their hearts so to do. The spiritual King would make his conquests through the spontaneous agency of his people. Their hearts would be made willing; and so would the administration be conducted in truth and righteousness, and not as "every battle of the warrior, with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood." Men would be brought into allegiance to Jesus, and kept under his peaceful sway, through the influence of the Spirit on their hearts, which would make them willing as well as loyal subjects of the heavenly king. This was a power which all the forces of earth could not resist or even injure. It would be absolutely infinite, because its source would be the "Seven Spirits" possessed by the Son of man.

(5) *The character that would prevail in the Kingdom.* We have glanced at our Lord's right to the mediatorial throne, at his forces, at his ability to reign, and at the nature of his dominion; we are now to contemplate the characteristics of his government. "*He that is holy, he that is true*" is the title which gives us the clear description of this. Purity and truth would be the grand characteristics of the administration, service, and subjects under him. Righteousness of life would be as prevalent in this kingdom of Christ as are selfishness and resulting corruption in the governments of earth. Absolute righteousness, purity on which there will be no taint of corruption, and truth from which there can be no swerving, will mark every word and act of the glorious King. Wisdom and justice and goodness will prevail in the whole administration of that celestial empire. When its power shall be fully established, then sincerity and truthfulness, and unselfish intercourse with each other, and perfect obedience to their

heavenly Lord, shall characterize the lives of all who shall dwell beneath its sway. Holiness and truth and love, each perfectly exemplified in the supreme Lord, and flowing down from him upon all the subjects, shall bring forth their blessed fruits, in the righteousness and peace and happiness which shall prevail throughout the whole empire of the redeemed.

(6) *Destiny of the Kingdom.* Having seen, by means of the titles, Christ's right and ordination to the kingdom, his forces for controlling it, his qualifications, the nature of his dominion, and the character of his administration, the question then follows, What is to be the destiny of that kingdom? Again do the titles give the answer, and here in a single word: "*Amen.*" It is not easy to give a clear and exhaustive definition of this remarkable title of our Lord. Probably no one expression or similitude will describe it, or the characteristic of the kingdom which it implies. Substantialness as opposed to all mere sham or show, reality as opposed to mere pretense, and stability as opposed to that which is temporary and evanescent are its essential thought. Such is eminently the nature of the Son of man, the King, and such will be the character and destiny of his divine kingdom. Substantial, real, and ever-abiding, as he is, so also will his dominion be. As with the oath of God have its foundations been laid, and the decree been established that the very gates of hell shall not prevail against it. In all its aims, movements, and results, there is nothing which is merely temporary. All is to be substantial and enduring, lasting for evermore. It cannot come to an end, or be perverted from the sublime purpose to which it has been decreed by Him who is the Amen.

(7) *Assurance that all this concerning King and Kingdom is certainly true.* In our studies of the passage thus far we have seen our risen Lord's right to the kingdom, his forces prepared for conquering and ruling, his qualifications for that highest kingly office, the spiritual nature of the government to be established, the character and spirit that would prevail within it, and the immovable stability of the empire so set up; we would now have the assurance given us that all these were, are, and for ever will be so. Do we find such assurance from the titles? We must have certainly. For this also there is provision made in the titles. The list closes with one that leaves us without a doubt or question. It completes the description of our Lord as the ordained Sovereign Ruler. "*The Faithful and True Witness*" are its decisive words. He is true

—yea, the Truth itself. He is faithful in communicating to us the momentous facts just as they were and are. He has been an eyewitness of all the things which he relates. He cannot be mistaken and could not be deceived.

As a witness from God to man, he is worthy of perfect credence. As a witness from man to God, he is himself the pledge that could not be violated. Everything—promises, purposes, laws, assertions, warnings, hopes, counsels, revelations—all, past present, and to come, are, or will be, just as he declares them, though heaven and earth, and the whole universe, should pass away. All are certainly and eternally real, for he is "the faithful and true witness"—the trustworthy One into whose hands we may commit our souls and bodies and destinies for time and eternity.

Glance we now, in review, over the whole catalogue of these divine titles; and is there one thing we can conceive of as wanting to complete the list of attributes in our risen Lord, needed by him for taking the throne and reigning supreme and for ever? Forming them all into one connected description, we cannot but be filled with amazement at his perfect suitableness for the office upon which he was entering as supreme Lord of the mediatorial kingdom. Having conquered Satan and ransomed the Church by his own most precious blood, he was now ascending to that throne which had been promised of old: "There was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." His divine titles as they are found in the various messages are such as show his right and fitness for that dominion, as well as the manner in which he would exercise his authority, and the certainty that he would hold the throne for evermore. These titles declare of him that he was "the first and the last, which was dead and is alive;" "the Son of God;" "hath the key of David;" "the beginning of the creation of God," and so has an everlasting right to that supreme dominion; that he "holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks," and so had his forces ready to conquer and rule; that he was the One "out of whose mouth went the sharp sword with two edges," "hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like unto fine brass," and so has the perfect qualifications of omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence; that he

"hath the Seven Spirits of God," and hence his kingdom would be spiritual in its nature; that "He is the holy, he is the true," and will therefore reign in perfect truth and righteousness, as the character of both people and ruler; that he is "the Amen," and so his kingdom will be substantial and for ever; that "He is the faithful and true witness," and so he gave the whole world assurance that all these things will certainly come to pass under his sway. When the titles are all thus put together, we see that they leave nothing wanting in the description of Christ as the Mediatorial King; and there is nothing superfluous. All is complete and perfect as is He who is both the Founder of Zion and the Revealer of its nature and destiny.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE CELESTIAL WATCHER.

The next element in each of the messages which demands our special attention is the remarkable fact that in them all we find the expression "I know thy works." As a celestial Watcher our exalted Lord looks down from his throne and beholds the condition of each of his churches, and the conduct of every one of his spiritual soldiers. This feature of his administration is, in his estimation, of so much importance that he makes special reference to it in each of these messages whose words are so few and so weighty.

In two other instances—namely, in the expressions, "Him that overcometh," and "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches," we have the same phrases in each of the messages, and in them a communication of deepest importance was intended; analogy leads us to infer that in this case also there is something which calls for earnest attention.

It is evident that there is something of more than ordinary significance in the emphatic "I know thy works," which is seven times repeated in these communications from our ascended and enthroned Lord. In the words, as we hear them in his most earnest voice, as we see them on the sacred page, and as we behold his finger pointing to them, there is something which claims our earnest attention. It is as if we heard him charging us to notice them, read them, ponder them, and make them our guide in all our relations to his supreme government, to the Church, and to the world. Certainly this emphatic "I know thy works" is not a mere assertion of his omniscience in his relation to those churches. It is something else of vast moment, something specially connected with the great object of the messages, something which the church and the world greatly needed clearly to understand. By repeating it so often, and in such striking words, he would intimate its surpassing importance. He gave it this mark of his divine estimation, and then left the renewed heart to discover more and more clearly its deep significance.

We must next give special attention to the fact that with the

"I know" is always connected "*thy works.*" "I know thy works" is the invariable formula. Most significant is it that each of the churches is notified that its divine Head has his eye fixed upon all its works. It is not their faith, though that is the first step and the root of every other grace, which he names as claiming his special attention, and as kept in remembrance before him. It is not the humility and perseverance, as of the church of Philadelphia; nor the patience, as of Smyrna; nor the few faithful names, as of Sardis;—not these things, but their works, that he mentions. He does not recite their professions, or their desires, or their resolutions, but their works actually done for him and his cause. The design of this it is not difficult to discern. By the term works here he doubtless refers to their whole church life and activity—and that not only to their positive acts, but also to their efforts and feelings and purposes. It was a very comprehensive term, which included their actions, virtues, graces, and their examples—in a word, the whole tone and character of their lives.

There must have been an important reason for this, as in other scriptures where the works of believers, rather than their faith or love or other graces are made the ground and measure of the divine approval. It might appear sufficient to explain that their "works" is a general, comprehensive expression intended to include faith, love, patience, and all the other Christian graces. That is no doubt the fact, and it can be easily comprehended; but there was probably a more important reason for its use—a reason that aimed at presenting the pre-eminent value of good works as a manifestation of Christian character. This point is so important that we would impress it by means of the following distinct propositions: (1) Good works are a clear indication of the inlying faith, and love, and zeal, and other graces of the heart from which they spring—for "Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh." (2) The works are what give tone and character to the whole life—are, in fact, the inner life made manifest; so that the Holy Spirit could direct it to be written of those who die in the Lord, "Their works do follow them." (3) The works of the life are what the world can see and understand of the believer, and that from which men are led to form their opinion of religion. (4) The separate and united works of the people of God are the grand instrumentality divinely appointed through which the interests of the kingdom are to be promoted, and the cause of Christ built up in the world. (5) Good works furnish one of the most important methods by which we may become assimilated to the image

of Him of whom it was recorded to his glory that "He went about doing good." From all this it is abundantly evident why "thy works" was a term used to denote the whole character and life of the true followers of Christ.

The repeated use of the expression as that which God especially saw and noted, is the divine stamp, clear and deep, set upon good works. We should not be so reluctant to use the expression as some seem to be; for it is the first thing in the people of God that is noticed in this communication from the mediatorial throne. "*Church work*" is no new "fruit of the Spirit" as seen in those who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ. It is the first, the oldest, and the most important bond which connects them with the salvation of the world on which the heart of our Lord is set. Well may we constantly insist on the importance of "church work"—work for the upbuilding of the Church of our Lord—work for Christ, for souls, work for the salvation of all the lost sons of men.

We have not forgotten that "thy works," which our Lord here so often proclaims himself as watching, include the *evil* works in some of the churches as well as the *good* works in others. These also lie clearly before him, and he very solemnly warns against them. We, however, make this allusion only to them here, in order that our undivided and earnest attention may be fixed upon those which are specially characteristic of the true followers of our Lord.

A second point in this divine superintendence of the kingdom as revealed to us by the repeated and emphatic assurance of God's observance of every point in the character and life of its subjects, is that he not only knows but also *exercises a providential influence* over all the movements of its history. It is the clearest evidence we could possibly have that he is conducting all the interests of the kingdom so as to promote the work of saving the lost world of mankind. His attention to it all is so minute that at each point it can be graciously said, "I know thy works." He knows them all so perfectly, because every item of the history is but the working out of his own providential plans for saving the world. He repeats again and again that he knows the works of his people, because he is not simply a watcher of the events, but exercises effective knowledge, knowledge that is active, knowledge of his all-pervading providence, whereby are wrought out his own infinitely wise and gracious plans in his kingdom and in the world. This repeated and emphatic "I

know thy works," uttered here at the beginning of the revelation of the things which were "seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter," intimated in the most significant manner that, unknown to the actors, he would retain not only the oversight, but also the minute direction, of all the coming events of the kingdom. Launching the mediatorial kingdom amid the empires of earth and the ages of time, he fully indentifies himself with it, and pledges his own care over all its interests. Whatever might befall that cause, in all its vicissitudes, through darkness and light, through storms and calms, through alarms and peace, all its interests would be under his own eyes and in his own hands.

That the Lord of the kingdom would, through all ages, exercise such minute providential oversight over every point of its interests is made certain and impressive by this expression in the messages, as it is also by many other declarations of Scripture. Among such assurances we have, in the New Testament, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world: amen;" and in the Old Testament, the strong assurance which the Holy Ghost prompted: "I blessed the Most High, and praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation; and all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?" Upon this universal control and knowledge of all things, past, present, and to come, it is that all prophecy and all certainty as to future events are founded. According to it has our almighty King laid out all his plans of the celestial empire. Hence it is made certain, both by Scripture and by the facts of the case, that when we hear from the lips of our Lord "I know thy works," it is because his providential hand is guiding all things to the accomplishment of his own gracious purposes.

The marvel is that this can be done, and still the responsibility rest upon the actors themselves who are working out the divine will. The almighty King touches the springs, and the needed activity is awakened. He guides the currents of energy, and the intended results are accomplished. The depraved works of evil men are restrained or overruled, and they are punished; the right aims of the faithful are blessed and aided, and their fidelity rewarded: and by both, as by every other purpose and

act of men, the sovereign designs of the glorious kingdom are wrought out. All this is because the supreme Lord identifies himself with even the minute interests of the cause, making it his own, and directing it to the fulfillment of his sovereign will, allowing men to be the actors, but himself guiding and moving forward his own gracious plans.

It thus comes to pass that the seven times repeated "I know thy works" is, to all its loyal subjects, a comforting revelation concerning the mediatorial kingdom. Its destinies are not entrusted to the caprice of human agents, but are simply the working out of the plans of the infinitely wise and omnipotent Jehovah. His kingdom will fail by no unforeseen catastrophe, for he witnesses and overrules all. It cannot fail of its infinitely gracious purpose: for the direction of all its future is with him. By the eye of faith we behold the Church which Christ purchased with his own blood, moving on through the ages of the world, though dangers of every kind beset it; for his infallible wisdom is directing every change, and his impenetrable shield is over all.

The oft-repeated and deeply significant "I know thy works" is a pledge to all the people of God that the divine kingdom will not be left to the uncertainties of chance, and that wreck and destruction will never be permitted to overtake it. Launched, as it then was, upon such a stormy sea and with such formidable dangers awaiting it at every turn, what could possibly preserve it from ruin? Such vigilant and mighty enemies as Satan and his legions would assail it, and what could save it? It would have to encounter obstacles and opposition without cessation, and how could it escape? The human agents set for its defense would be subject to many infirmities, would be weak and sinful and make mistakes that might be disastrous. Fallible and inexperienced, they could not be relied upon in times of danger. The time would be so long, the events so many and complicated, and the work so wearying, that if the cause were left to itself, disaster and ruin would inevitably befall it. The mistakes of the past, with all its calamities, are calculated to make the sense of these dangers the more appalling. Did we not have confidence in our Lord's watchful care there would be scarce a ray of hope for us in all the future. Without this there could be no fixed plans for the future of the kingdom, no predictions to comfort, no happy results to be anticipated. What certainty could there then be that all the glorious things foretold concerning the kingdom

would ever be accomplished? And yet these are things about which the utmost certainty is needed—needed for the faith of believers, needed for the comfort of the Church, needed as a bulwark against the attacks of the enemies.

In the light of these facts, we can see plainly the intention of, and appreciate more fully, the emphatic and repeated "I know thy works." It is a peculiar and impressive manner of asserting our Lord's unflagging oversight of every point and every interest of the divine kingdom. He would not leave to themselves, or to mere chance, events so many, so far separated, and so slow in their development; but would carefully watch them all, and himself control their progress. His eye would be constantly fixed upon all the vicissitudes of the divine kingdom. That eye which never sleeps would follow every movement in all their boundless scope, and in all the successive ages. His infinite wisdom and power would touch the springs of every change. He would evermore be on the watchtower. All the complications of the kingdom's future history would be kept in his hand. From this it would follow that its decline or overthrow would be impossible. The utmost confidence may be placed in its safety and final triumph. The gates of hell could not, would not be permitted to prevail against it.

Moreover, that he would retain a minute oversight of all the fortunes of the divine kingdom during all the ages to come, and that his providential hand would be in them all, is not all the truth that is intimated in the oft-repeated "I know thy works." It is not all, nor is it the best of this communication from the throne. Not obscurely does it also imply that in all the future events of the mediatorial kingdom God has a plan of grace, and that he watches and directs every point in its history to the fulfillment thereof. That plan is sketched out in the Apocalypse for the instruction of his people, and the reiterated "I know thy works" at the beginning, is his pledge that his infinite wisdom and power would direct all, with unerring certainty, to its glorious consummation. The scheme of events that would lead to this magnificent climax was definite, the divine perfections engaged would make it certain, and its prophetic outline was this closing book of the sacred volume. The fact is a most glorious one that, with the whole field of this grandest enterprise of earth spread out before him, the almighty King declares to all its agents, of the past, present, and future, "I know thy works."

This assurance is calculated to give peculiar satisfaction to all

who are interested in the divine enterprise. All appears as a glorious reality, fixed, certain, immovable as the throne of God. If the whole ordering of the fortunes of the mediatorial kingdom were not seen to be in God's hand, there could be no reliable expectations as to the future of our race. If the movements of the kingdom were dependent on created agents there could be no certainty as to anything that is coming. All the work of the divine kingdom is stupendously great and complicated; how could finite wisdom and power direct it? It covers the whole range of the universe, and sweeps on throughout all the ages to come: how could mortal arm reach it all, or mortal wisdom direct its movements? This seven times repeated "I know thy works" intimates, in a manner that amounts to absolute assurance, that there is such a distinct purpose, and plan for accomplishing it, in all God's management of the affairs of his Church. His looking down along all the ages and affirming at every point "I know thy works" proves that all events are plainly before him, that he is deeply interested in them, that they are fixed as coming realities; and that they are so established is undoubted evidence that they are parts of some sublime scheme which the Lord is working out. It intimates the same glorious fact as "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world: amen." The words thus become wondrously significant, as, in substance, they declare: "I know that you are, and how you are, working out my great plan formed from the everlasting ages." There can thus be no possible failure in the ultimate completion of that magnificent scheme in the kingdom which depends not upon fallible human agents, but upon the perfections of the almighty Jehovah.

What we can see and comprehend in the developments of human history, and what we can read in the pages of the Apocalypse, are but the outline of this divine scheme. The vicissitudes of the present day, the events which are sometimes light and sometimes dark, are simply the advancing evolutions of the battlefield of the kingdom. All the movements of the divine kingdom, whether in the ages that are past, or at the present hour, or in the unknown years yet to come, are but the carrying out of the everlasting purposes of the heavenly King. This is true as to all times and all the interests of the Church. They are not shaped by the whims of creatures, nor are they the results of chance, or the developments of human progress, but the orderings of God's all-perfect will. They are but the out-

working of his eternal plan. His great ultimate design is never lost sight of, and never bent out of the course which his infinite wisdom had designed. Onward moves the glorious scheme whose ultimate aim is the destruction of Satan, the redemption of our lost race, and the establishment over all the world of the everlasting kingdom of truth and righteousness and bliss. His plan for this grand consummation takes in the scope of the centuries. He watches and overrules every movement. As some renowned commander who leads a vast army in a battle on whose issue depends the fate of nations, stationed on some elevated spot where the whole battlefield lies before him, watches every movement until victory is achieved, so is it with the Captain of our salvation: having been made perfect through suffering, he stands on the heavenly heights, beholding every change in the conflict with Satan, and ordering every action until the conquest shall be complete and final.

That decisive victory will surely come. The eye that is fixed on the battlefield cannot be eluded, the wisdom that orders each evolution cannot be out-generaled, the omnipotence that holds the forces in his hands cannot be defeated. Enemies may plot, but "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh;" friends may mistake, but unerring wisdom shall repair all; adversity may darken, but a brighter light shall follow. Not a stratagem shall be opposed, not a squadron shall move, but the cheering sound shall be heard, "I know thy works." By a word the supreme leader might bring on the crisis at any moment, but by long waiting the victory shall be rendered the more transcendently glorious.

Such are some of the general results which are involved in the seven times repeated "I know thy works;" but the subject comes nearer home and conveys more practical information when we consider it in its application to individuals and to single churches. The Lord of the kingdom declares his intimate and all-comprehending knowledge of the condition of his churches, and that in the whole world. Both as a summary thereof and a sample of that minute acquaintance with them, the general state of these seven churches is described. The very solemn announcement is "I know"—of Ephesus, "thy labor and thy patience;" of Smyrna, "tribulation and poverty;" of Pergamos, "where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is;" of Thyatira, "thy charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience;" of Sardis, "that thou hast a name that thou livest and art dead;" of Phila-

delphia, "I have set before thee an open door;" of Laodicea, "that thou art neither cold nor hot." These were the leading things that the all-seeing King did especially note concerning the various churches. Not one of them lay hidden from his all-seeing eye. He also saw distinctly all the causes which produced such spiritual states, as well as all the results that would flow from them, and that in every case. All the evils that could prevail, and all the defects that could mar, were known to him. All the fidelity that could distinguish and adorn received his approving notice. It was so then, and it is so still—as was so finely portrayed by the Rev. Robert Hall of England: "'I know thy works'" is a declaration with which He prefaces his admonitory epistles. Nothing in the behavior of Christian churches escapes his notice whose 'eyes are as a flame of fire.' He remarks the attention or inattention with which his messages are received; he notices who are formal and lukewarm, and who fervent and sincere in their worship; who are diligent in their attendance on the means of grace, and who are glad to avail themselves of trivial excuses for neglecting them. He notices all the different degrees of seriousness which professing Christians bring into the divine service. There is not a sigh from the contrite, nor a tear of penitential sorrow, or of tender joy, that escapes his notice. 'He looks not at outward appearances, but at the heart.' He perceives the difference betwixt those churches which have 'left their first love,' and those who are diligently pressing on to perfection; betwixt those who are indifferent to the extension of his kingdom, and those who are incessantly laboring and praying for its enlargement; those who decline to the paths of error and 'hold the doctrine which he hates,' and those who 'hold fast the form of sound words.'" We may depend on it as a stupendous reality, terrible to the unfaithful, but most encouraging to those who are loyal to Christ and his church, that our whole spiritual condition, as churches or as individuals, lies clearly revealed before that omniscient Lord with whom we have to do.

*Place in the Beacon.* We are now prepared to contemplate and to adore the loving care of our gracious Lord in having thus placed in the Beacon intended for the warning of the people of God in all time, this notice of his sleepless attention to them and to all the affairs of his kingdom throughout the whole world. How blessed the divine assurance that he would never overlook one individual, or one interest of the Church. What deep emphasis did our compassionate

Redeemer, in another connection, lay upon the blessed truth: "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered." Not a sparrow can fall, not a child of God can fall asleep in death, not an enemy can raise his hand against the Church of our Lord, not one obstacle can stand in the way to obstruct the progress of the truth, but all passes under the penetrating eye of Him with whom we have to do. All is distinctly before him: "A book of remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the Lord and that thought upon his name." In all our changeful life there is no spot where Jesus sees us not. Alike in the bright sunshine, and in the darkness of the winter's tempest, his eye is over his people in the tenderest care. When the hill is steep, and thorns and briars cover it, he is watching his weary flock, he pities them and helps them. Through the soft green meadows, and beside the still waters, he guards and guides them tenderly. He knows the works of all his followers. He knows their desires as well as their motives. Men judge by the results, he by the secret springs in the heart. When our spirit grows weary, we can lean on him who is ever by our side. When fainting in prayer and almost ready to give up, we can take encouragement from the certainty that he who seeth in secret is watching and helping. Upborne by the everlasting arms, and looking to the Author and Finisher of our faith, we are nerved to press on to the joy that is set before us.

That our Lord does exercise this minute supervision over every creature and every event, and that on behalf of the interests of his Church, is at once a sublime fact and an awful mystery. We are made sure that it is a fact, even though we are not able fully to comprehend it. How inscrutable it is that, although the government of the whole universe is in his hands, he is not too busy to watch over us and care for all our interests! Sublime beyond imagination it is that He before whom the angels bow and the archangels veil their faces with their wings, will yet condescend to behold and to keep guard over us creatures —fallen creatures of a sinful race! We become lost in adoring wonder as we reflect that the Most High God, the infinite and eternal Jehovah, would overlook the ocean sublimely raging, the volcano belching out its floods of fire, or the comet dashing through the fields of space, rather than the welfare of one humble soul which has been redeemed by the blood of his own dear Son. From amidst the celestial court, whence the angels fly away on

many an errand to distant worlds, and where the cherubim await his commands, the Almighty looks down with tender care upon his lowliest servant on earth who toils for him.

Awful would it be for us were it not so—were not our adorable Lord exercising this ceaseless oversight of us. Dreadful would be our prospects were we alone in the world. What would be our lot were there not such a heart of infinite love, and such an arm of almighty power to guard us! But we are not alone. The King of kings and Lord of lords cares for us, and has his all-seeing eye for ever fixed upon us. He watches over all our welfare. He witnesses even our thoughts, our feelings, and our purposes. He sees the dangers which threaten us, and guards us from them. He sees our sins, with deep repugnance, and yet he shows that he is willing to pardon. Our sorrows are known and sympathized in by Him who was once the "Man of sorrows;" and they are so guided as to work out the greater purity of the soul.

All the good which we are enabled to do is carefully marked. Not one such act is ever forgotten; but God's eye is fixed upon every act, his ear attent to every word, every purpose even is noted,—and all is kept in everlasting remembrance. Every such act and purpose calls forth his divine approval; in it our gracious Lord sees of the travail of his soul, and is satisfied; a new joy thrills the heart of Jesus our Friend. Nothing that you do, believer, for the poor and suffering of your fellow men, for the honor of your Lord, and for the triumph of his kingdom is ever unnoticed or forgotten by our blessed Redeemer. When you are wrestling strongly with some besetting sin, or shedding the penitential tear because of some grievous transgression, or longing in your inmost soul for an increase of spirituality in your daily walk, or, perhaps in the silent night, planning some scheme by which to relieve the sufferings of an afflicted neighbor, or speaking words of kind advice to a friendless child or beggar in tattered clothing, or giving the faithful instruction that would direct the outcast sinner to the reconciling blood, or taking some wanderer by the hand and leading him to the Cross, or only pointing the lost victim of sin and wretchedness to Calvary and the celestial gate above it: depend upon it that in all these things, which are nothing in the eyes of the world, you are attentively regarded by Him who will not suffer even the gift of a cup of water to go without a reward!

Be ye, then, cheered and filled with the brightest hope at

the animating thought that his eye is upon you in all your works and trials and victories. It is lovingly fixed upon you as you bravely stand up for him amidst an indifferent or infidel generation; as your heart often sinks at sight of the dreadful worldliness prevailing on every hand; and as you are daily making sacrifices to stay that sad tide of indifference to God and his truth. Sometimes it may appear to you to be very hard to be stigmatized as odd and disagreeable, to be misunderstood or misrepresented by those with whom you would stand well; to be branded as self-righteous, or righteous overmuch: but bear all patiently—for he is looking upon all that you are doing or suffering; he is watching all with the most tender affection. You are not overlooked, or despised, or treated as an insignificant thing by the glorious King. Others of the gay and worldly multitude may be so regarded by him, but assuredly not you whose hearts are in his cause. Think of the surpassing honor and blessedness it is to have the special regard of Jehovah; to have him notice you, to have him smile upon you, even though the thoughtless world may turn away in scorn; to have his omnipotent arm around you, no matter though all the world of the frivolous, the thoughtless, and the wicked be in arms against you.

Be true, then, to your Lord and Saviour. Be of that number, renowned even in the courts of heaven, "who have not defiled their garments." Be thus steadfast, even though the whole bent and fashion of the world be otherwise. Though the multitude may sneer at you with the most bitter scorn; though by your course you may estrange those whom you would prize as friends; though, for the cause of Christ, you may have to make sacrifices the most painful; though you may behold no immediate gain therefrom; though what is required of you may be repugnant to your feelings; though your faltering footsteps may sometimes have to be taken in the dark and amid the untried; though you may have to wait long for even a break in the cloud; though frequently tired, and weak, and sore from the journey;—notwithstanding all these, and still other discouragements, wait, trust—still trust! You will see the wisdom of so doing by and by. Listen to God's assured declaration, "I know thy works." He has not forgotten you, be sure of that, any more than he had forgotten those his dear followers in the seven churches who stood faithful to him amid all kinds of opposition, even amid persecution to the death. Even though all seems dark, and you feel not his presence, yet, all the time, he is looking down benignly

upon you. Through the gloom and the night and the storm, his eye is not off you for one instant. Through those very trials he is plaiting chords that will vibrate in the expression of joys that will be immortal. His angels, at his behest, are writing down your record in the book of life. By and by you will hear his welcome voice receiving you home, and it will transport your soul with an ecstasy of joy that will never lose its zest.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### DARK SPOTS.

Obviously the leading intention of this Beacon of the ages, as of all similar signals, is to give warning of dangers by indicating where they have been met with by others. To accomplish this end it must be pointed out clearly what such dangers are and where they lie. Examples must be given to show how others have suffered from such lurking perils. In these communications from the throne of our Lord this is no doubt the most important element. To each church there is given a most solemn admonition of where it has failed—perhaps fallen into irreparable ruin. These several warnings gathered up into one body, compared, analyzed, and studied in their relations, and influences upon each other, become a Beacon for the whole Church, more valuable than the most famous lighthouse ever erected to warn vessels freighted with the most precious cargoes, of shoals and rocks and currents coming in contact with which they must inevitably perish.

In all the messages, save two, there are rebukes of falls, shortcomings, faults and failures and errors of various kinds and degrees of culpability. The things rebuked are so many and of such varied character as to extend to all dangers into which any people are liable to fall. They are presented in their various shades of turpitude. Sometimes but one is laid to the charge of a single church, and that because it is the leading characteristic of that people; sometimes one is made most prominent, while others are less conspicuous; sometimes the same charge is laid against several of the churches. They are so many and varied, and imply so much, as to extend to all the errors and sins into which churches losing their loyalty to Christ ordinarily fall. They are of priceless importance as warnings to the whole Church.

In the beginning we are met by a question of some practical difficulty as to how we can classify these things censured in the churches, so that together they may produce the impression for which they were intended. It would be too tedious a task to

take each one of the rebukes in the messages, and dwell upon it separately, and we must adopt some other method. We shall therefore endeavor to deduce from the many points of censure the general principles involved; collect, analyze, and combine these principles into such definite forms as can be easily comprehended; and then, as illustrations of these principles, present in detail the leading points under which all the censures may be classed.

We first investigate the evil principles, tendencies, or characteristics which are exposed through the messages, and the operation of which has caused the evils which have ever afflicted the Church of God. A careful analysis and classification shows that these are six in number, and that they comprehend all the corrupt tendencies that are ordinarily found in the Church and the world. Their reality as well as their meaning will be seen as we glance at all the things here censured, and then locate them in their proper place.

(1) *The Devil generally carries on his seductive work against the divine Kingdom by assuming the plans and the appearance of God.* Some one has expressed this, perhaps with too much levity but with much truthfulness and appropriateness: "Satan is the ape of God." The messages expose this fact in a manner that is startling. Our Lord had his apostles: so, in Ephesus we see Satan's apostles with their lying pretensions. The Church of God had its synagogues: so, in Smyrna and in Sardis, we read of the synagogue of Satan. Our Lord, Jehovah, appointed his true prophets: so, in Thyatira, we hear of Jezebel calling herself a prophetess. Our Lord established love as the great principle that was to prevail over all in his kingdom: so, in Pergamos and others of the churches, we find love prevailing still, but turned by Satan into lust. "Ye are not *under* the law, but under grace," saith the Spirit. "True," says Satan, but carries it farther: "ye are therefore *over* the law," and so goes on to the deadly heresy of antinomianism with its grossest sensuality. It is so in other parts of Scripture where the devil imitates God to the destruction of untold millions of souls. In Eden his seductive words were: "Be as gods, knowing good and evil." This seductive device of the devil is very significant, and very real and dangerous to souls that could not be destroyed by any open attacks of the Evil one, but are promptly overcome when he shows himself as an angel of light.

(2) *Errors are generally distorted truths.* Almost all heresies

that have ever afflicted the Church of God have been exaggerated or perverted truths. Very seldom indeed have the enemies of God and truth dared to promulgate systems fabricated out of pure lies. They have rather taken admitted truths of religion and distorted them so as to make them the grossest of falsehoods. In this way they have gained for them a respectability that would otherwise have been impossible. The whole Church has been warned of this danger by a notable example in these messages. A glorious truth of the gospel as impressively set forth by the apostle Paul is that believers "are not under the law, but under grace"—meaning obviously that our salvation is not dependent upon our own works of the law, but upon the free grace of God who bestows it. That is the blessed foundation upon which all our hopes are established. But the enemy takes it, exaggerates it, and distorts it into the most abominable falsehood. It is perverted into the soul-destroying lie that if not under the law we are above it; we have nothing to do with it; it has no binding authority over us; to go contrary to it is for us no sin. Therefrom comes antinomianism with all its brood of doctrinal and practical corruptions. It opens the door to the most wretched self-indulgence. The abominations of Balaam, the gross uncleanness of the Nicolaitans, and the debaucheries of Jezebel are no sin! Grosser perversions still—if possible! The blessed spirit of the gospel breathes in the words: "Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God." This is true and most blessed; but the depraved heart distorts that love of the Spirit into the lust of the flesh—lust gross, abominable, and unrestrained. The most loathsome corruption became a religious duty. To contend earnestly for the faith is an important command, but it is corrupted into pharasaism and persecution. The Church is one of God's richest gifts to mankind; but it is perverted into Antichrist. The Bible is more precious in its teachings and influence upon the destines of mankind than all that the wisdom of the ages has to bestow; but it has been made to support the most destructive heresies. There is nothing in this Beacon from the throne of our ascended Lord against which the people of God are warned more solemnly than they are against this tendency seen in the first churches to pervert the purest truth into the most wretched falsehoods.

(3) *Errors in doctrine and corruption in practice always go hand in hand.* This deplorable tendency pervades the whole of the rebukes in the messages. Just as these churches lost the

purity of their faith did they sink more and more into degradation of life. The doctrines of Balaam and the Nicolaitans and the teachings of Jezebel were the root from which there sprang a moral depravity of darkest hue. The eating of meat offered to idols and the practice of fornication were so closely linked together that they received an equal censure by the first council in Jerusalem. Falsehood when admitted into the mind corrupts the whole man. There never was more dangerous teaching than that which asserts that it is no matter what one believes if only he be right in his life. The thing cannot be. Believe a lie, and the whole life becomes a lie. Error is defiling in its very nature. The whole history of the divine kingdom, from the time when these messages were delivered to the prophet in Patmos until the present hour, proves it to be a fact that departures from the truth in doctrine are invariably followed by departures from the right in morals.

(4) *The great danger of affiliation with sin, sinful courses, and sinful people.* Scarcely any warning of the whole Beacon is more needed than this. In different forms and connections it is repeated no less than five times, and has connected with it the strongest language of censure that could be framed. To the praise of the church of Ephesus it was recorded that they could not endure the lewd system of the Nicolaitans. The great sin of the Pergamese was that they harbored the abominable doctrines of Baalam and of the Nicolaitans. The church of Thyatira was condemned for enduring the vile teachings exemplified by Jezebel. More plain, direct, and forcible than all the rest, is the declaration that God hates such a course; yea, *hates* it—the very word used, and one of the strongest expressions of divine aversion ever uttered by our compassionate Lord. Nor may we stop even with this condemnation of the sin of affiliating with evil doctrines and evil people. Elsewhere in Scripture the language used concerning it is that of absolute abomination—the only thing so stigmatized in the Word of God. The having to do with it in any form is like handling a garment contaminated with some deadly plague. Hence the earnest caution concerning it: "Pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh."

It is not safe for any one to have anything to do with evil doctrines, or practice, or people. To tamper with sceptical methods of faith, or meddle with so-called higher criticisms, or trifle with departed spirits, good or evil, is worse than waste of

time; it is not safe even for those who think themselves the most firmly established. The folly of so doing is not new. By it in part, at least, three of the seven churches fell; and the Beacon warns that so it will be, over and over again, whilst such folly is indulged. The course is one of Satan's common devices. Men will not plunge into such corruptions at once; but they can be led on gradually, and that by constantly associating with evil. The usual process is substantially this: affiliation so as to become familiar with the evil system; then it ceases to be so evil as it had been supposed; then some things that are good in it; then opposition to it is but narrow prejudice; then a slight participation in it, but only for once; then more strongly attracted by its charms; then the whole power of the soul given up to it, and that at the awful risk of both soul and body in hell for ever. There is, in solemn fact, no safety but in shunning it absolutely, and keeping aloof from its contaminating touch. These churches were contaminated to their utter undoing, and so would be ten thousand others. The Bible does not shun the language, neither should we: we should *hate* the unholy influence.

(5) *It is not good for a church to be without any opposition.* We have dwelt on this point elsewhere and will add but little here. The strange yet undoubted fact was wrought out into the clearest proof by the experience of these first churches, that the real prosperity of any Christian people is not promoted by the entire absence of foes to the cause. This may at first appear to be a startling admission, but the facts contained in the messages leave it with scarce a question. The only churches of the seven which had no adversaries or resistance of any kind were those of Sardis and Laodicea, and these two were in the worst condition of all—one with a name to live but in reality dead, and the other neither hot nor cold, and on the verge of utter rejection.

Nor was this all in the messages which bore on the same point. The two churches which were the most bitterly opposed and persecuted of all were those of Smyrna and Philadelphia, and yet they were the only ones against which there was not a syllable of rebuke. We cannot, then, be mistaken in the conclusion we have drawn. Opposition from enemies, even to the point of persecution, is positively conducive to a church's highest welfare in the end. The faithful are kept vigilant and active thereby, and so their Christian graces are developed, and the special blessing of the Lord of the Church, bestowed on them, so rests upon them as to give them the truest prosperity; and the truth which has to

be contended for is more highly prized and more fully improved. As is his wont, our Lord turns the curse into a blessing.

Well may we, therefore, look upon all opposition to the cause of Christ in a very different light from what we ordinarily do. In this, as in all things else, our wonder-working Lord makes the wrath of man to praise him. And no longer is the divinely-ordained rule, that heaven is to be reached through much tribulation, a cause for lamentation. We should not lament, but so improve the rule that it may aid in the great work to which we are appointed.

(6) *Aims in God's service short of perfection are sinful.* This last of the evil principles condemned in the messages demands our earnest attention. The impression upon the minds of many even true believers is quite different. If only we do the best we can in both doctrine and practice, that is all that is required of us, is the very imperfect view of most people, whether they acknowledge it or not. But God decides otherwise, and he has put his decision into this Beacon of the ages, to be seen clearly by all those who would enter his kingdom. He has ordained perfection as the goal for which all his people are continually to aim: "created in Christ Jesus unto good works." That goal or standard is very definite. Its essential idea is full consecration of body and soul to Christ and his redeeming work. Perfection—though the word has been most grossly misrepresented—is, in truth, the ordained end of every true child of God. This runs through all the teachings of Scripture as to the Christian's calling in Christ Jesus. In one place we hear: "This *one thing* I do; forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Not yet perfect, but pressing on toward it as his goal, he pursued his blessed calling. Another very plain intimation of the same sublime law we have in the invoked benediction: "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly: and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Another intimation is: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." No doubt is left when we read our Lord's own earnest charge: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

It is exceedingly significant that so much stress is laid upon this goal of perfection after which we are commanded to strain

every nerve. Its place in this Beacon erected for the guidance of the whole of the churches in all time makes it peculiarly forcible here. The very form in which it is introduced gives it special emphasis: "For I have not found thy works perfect before God." He had his eye fixed upon them, he had examined, he had weighed them, as a matter in which their whole character and standing were involved. He had investigated and found that they were not perfect. They were not complete; not full in all the Christian virtues; not ripe, pure, rich; not up to the standard of gospel perfection. This he asserted *then*, that every follower of Christ throughout all future times might keep it before him that this goal had of a truth been erected. He rebukes them that they were not perfect according to their ordained calling. To aim after anything less, or to stop with anything short of that standard, was sin. Let the whole Church hear this! Let it never, never be forgotten! The goal of absolute perfection may not have been reached, may possibly never be reached this side of the grave; but still it is the goal, and must never be lost sight of while breath remains, and until the soul shall be swallowed up in the ocean of divine perfection in a blissful eternity.

These six general principles or tendencies of evil are so comprehensive that everything condemned in all the rebukes of the messages may be classed under one or other of them. They are general principles which array all before us; but the minuteness of detail found in the messages requires that we should be more specific. We must get nearer to the things condemned in order that the warnings of the Beacon may have their intended impression. We must take them in classes in order to reach all. We need hardly add that we are not called upon to review the general sins of men, but only those which are associated with ordinary church life. The rebukes are addressed to churches and pertain to censurable things which ordinarily arise in the intercourse of professed Christians. All such things, as they would arise in churches in all times, the Beacon holds up for warning in the following items which we have gathered and classified out of the messages. The former part may be regarded as general principles; this, as specific cases into which all the rebukes have been arranged.

I. *The loss of "first love."* First in the order of the messages, as well as first in the relation the rebukes bear to each other, we find the sin of having lost the first love. On every account this is peculiarly significant. It will always be found that the first

step in the process of backsliding is in the neglect of the private duties of the soul. It is doubtful whether any case can be found where any one has plunged from a condition of warm piety directly into one of gross transgression. Neglect of the Scriptures in secret, then hurried or neglected secret prayer, then watchfulness abandoned, then coldness of heart; then the door opened for any kind of inconsistency; then all gone. While first love continues, there is a guard around every other grace; when that is gone, there is no safety for the soul. All experience, the testimony of Scripture and the very nature of the case, make it positive that this is substantially the process in every case of spiritual shipwreck. Hence our enthroned Lord has placed as the first and most conspicuous element of the world's warning Beacon: "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love."

The progress of sin is *always downward*. First love having gone, then the course of evil is steadily downward. The rebukes in the messages make this painfully manifest. Ephesus loses its first love; Pergamos tampers with evil principles and evil associations; Thyatira imbibes the evil with which it at first becomes familiar, sinking into gross sensuality; Sardis falls into miserable hypocrisy; and last and lowest of all, Laodicea is in a state of self-conceited indifference which nothing short of divine power can penetrate. All these are typical cases, selected as such to be placed in the Beacon as warnings for all time. Either seen separately or studied in their lower degrees of departure from Christ and his cause, they ought to leave the deepest impression.

II. *Worldliness.* First love has cooled, zeal is gone, the gate to every form of backsliding has been opened, the Church has entered upon a deplorably retrograde course, and worldliness with all its dangers has taken possession. Nearly all the rebukes in the messages expose it in some of its soul-destroying tendencies. Worldliness! it is a widespread, varied, and formidable agency by which Satan is ever making war upon the divine kingdom. Its essential features are always the same, while its peculiar modes of attack are constantly varying, as it shapes itself according to the times, and places, and fashions of the day. It has a power of its own against which nothing can stand save the strength imparted by divine grace. Its fascination can easily overcome all, and that even when all declared hostility has failed; it beguiles and enslaves before its victims become aware of their danger. It is made so prominent in the Beacon that no earnest soul can

fail of recognizing it as one of the greatest dangers to which the cause of Christ would evermore be exposed. Alas! at the present day it is doing a most deadly work among the churches.

How many of our churches deserve the rebuke given to Sardis: "a name that thou livest, and art dead"? They have a name to live. They profess the religion of Christ; not for the world would they be deprived of the name Christian. But they are sadly like death; how nearly they bear that image! They suffer no persecution; they make no self-sacrifice. This worldly conformity that is blighting the churches may be but too plainly seen in the lamentable following after the tastes, fashions, and habits of the world; in the indulgence of frivolities and amusements that are distinctly worldly and regarded as such by all; in spending all available time in pursuits which are admitted to be purely of the world; in allowing the world to lead them away into things which neither God, nor Scripture, nor conscience would allow; in suffering the world to crowd out and banish what both God and religion claim a place for in the heart; in habitually giving the things of the world preference to the things of God and the soul; in carrying the world bodily into the very heart of the services of religion; and in what would almost seem a studied and persistent effort to obliterate all distinctions between Christ and the world. Such, at the present time, is the deplorable worldliness in the Church—of which fact, alas! there is no possibility of our being mistaken.

III. *Undue love of riches.* Among the dangers lying in the pathway of the Church, and against which she is specially warned by the Beacon, there are two which occupy a place of bad pre-eminence—namely, sensuality and undue love of money. The latter is a form of worldliness against which we cannot be too earnestly warned. It is one of the most formidable enemies to the interests of Christ's kingdom. As a general evil to the souls of men we have neither thoughts nor words by which we can exaggerate it. The way in which our Lord speaks of it makes its danger appear positively appalling. In one place he describes it as the personification of the world in opposition to Christ and his kingdom. As the pagan deity of riches he depicts it, and declares: "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon." One absolutely trembles as he hears from the compassionate lips of Jesus: "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!" More startling is his affirmation: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a

rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." The meaning in all plainness is that, humanly speaking, it is impossible for a rich man to be saved. So his hearers understood him, and they were shocked, as well they might be. And he did not correct them, but candidly added: "With man it is impossible, but not with God." With man it could not be; but a special exertion of divine power is needed to save those who have to contend with the usual obstacles which wealth interposes. It is safest for us to look at the matter just as God has placed it.

Evidently such inordinate love of wealth and its accumulation is incompatible with that supreme love to God and our fellow men which is the very essence of practical Christianity. It is only another name for *supreme selfishness;* and we must consider the train of wretched characteristics which it brings after it as its necessary consequents. Among such we find its egotism, which pompously boasts: "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing;" its absorption of the finer and subtler energies of the soul; its belittling of the whole man; its straining of the principles of integrity towards others; its withering up of the best sympathies of our nature—in a word, its wretched concentration of all that is generous and fair, and God-like, or even manly, upon self and selfish aims. It is declared by our blessed Lord himself to be his great antagonist in the elevation of the race. It lies at the very root of the apostasy which leaves mankind crushed and in ruins.

The secret of its destructive power is easily comprehended. To say nothing of its ordinary grosser forms, such as unholy competitions, larger or smaller dishonesties, selfish overreachings, and kindred sins, how can we exaggerate its power of evil in its absorbing and taking away all the strongest and finest energies of the mind from the Church and her interests? The whole history of the kingdom has proved and is proving still that covetousness is one of the greatest practical evils with which the cause of Christ has to contend. Where it prevails it paralyzes everything. Every branch of the work of the kingdom withers beneath its blighting influence. Nothing can flourish where its poisonous sway is felt. Its touch is deadly. It is the very bane of the Church of God, as its own nature teaches, as all experience proves, and as these warnings in the Beacon make impressive to all who heed them.

Let there be no misunderstanding, however. It is not wealth in itself that is condemned. We have been careful all along to use the expression *undue love of riches.* Wealth is a gift of God,

and a true and very great blessing. Only when it is perverted and abused does it become a curse. As an embodiment of power for doing good, an efficient agency through which every one may do something by which to help forward the cause, and a method by which to glorify God, we can scarcely exaggerate the value of riches. One may not be able to go out to the highways and hedges to gather in the poor to the gospel feast, or to go to the lost nations carrying the saving story of the Cross; but here is a method which God has graciously ordained through which every one, no matter how humble, can lend a helping hand in sending others upon that blessed mission. We can scarcely conceive a nobler life than that of one who lives to plan, and work, and save, in order that he may have the means of doing good by helping forward the cause. Wealth then becomes an inestimable blessing, bestowed by Him who is the Author of every good and perfect gift.

How marvelous in importance is this one element of the Beacon! This one warning alone stamps the messages as a gift of God to the churches whose value cannot be fully estimated. Oh that this single idea could be enstamped upon every soul: *Riches, when unduly coveted, produce a character which our righteous Lord so greatly loathes that he will spue it out of his mouth; but when used for the purpose which he intended, will form a character that Christ will place beside himself in his Father's throne.*

IV. *Pride.* This is one of the grievous evils for ever menacing the Church upon which it was evidently intended to stamp the deepest brand. Its position and surroundings in the messages show that it was specially offensive in the sight of God. "Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." What scorn is implied in every word! It is one of the most disgusting forms of worldliness, and an offshoot from undue love of money. Pride of wealth is perhaps the most common form of that evil; but it is not by any means its only form. There is pride of talents, pride of position, pride of family, pride of personal attractions, and many other kinds of pride, but all grossly unbecoming in any one who is a sinner in the sight of God.

Such self-conceit as is rebuked here, both in itself and in its effects is a great blemish and injury to the Christian character. The contempt with which it is treated in the messages, as well as the laudatory way in which its opposite, the virtue of humility, is always spoken of in Scripture, prove how great an evil it is in God's sight. "Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have

need of nothing." Where else does our Lord use such language of irony as this? As an evil by which the soul loses its beauty and most attractive charm, the arrogance of pride has not been regarded with sufficient horror. *It was pride that drove our first parents out of Eden; it was pride that cast down Satan from the companionship of the blessed.*

Pride, as a thing hateful in the sight of both God and man, as a blight upon all that is noble and truly exalting in the soul, as a great evil at the time when these messages were sent and that evermore would be lamentably common as a formidable foe to the cause of Christ, received a deservedly prominent place in these warnings of the Beacon. As vainglorious in its pretensions, inflated in its egotism, and only preparing for God's scornful rejection, it could not be too severely stigmatized. Its loathsomeness was such that it was even treated with ridicule. God alone knows its emptiness, and how little it had of which to boast, and he utters the withering rebuke. It was peculiarly offensive to his omniscient eye; for its very essence consists in making a god of self, and worshiping that idol, and so it is the most ignoble of all idolatry. It sounds strange to us as coming from the lips of God, and yet it is a truth that he brands the self-conceited man as a fool, saying to him, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee"—or rather, more correctly, and full of scorn, "Fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee."

We can see from such things as these that pride is exceedingly repulsive to our Lord; but we can see this just as clearly in his frequent praise of humility, which is its opposite. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." "Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and *be clothed with humility;* for God resisteth the proud, and *giveth grace to the humble.*" The chosen one in the sight of our Lord was not the Pharisee who boasted, "God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican: I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all I possess." Not this vain boaster did Christ choose, but the poor publican who was too humble even to raise his head, and only breathed out, "God be merciful to me a sinner." The lordly Naaman must humble himself before the despised prophet of God, and dip in the Jordan before he could be healed. What Christ was and what he loved in his followers was intimated in the words, "Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly of heart." The humility that he loved he did himself exemplify when he entered into Jerusalem, as its Anointed King,

"sitting on an ass's colt." More impressive still was the example which he purposely set on that memorable night when he girded himself with a towel and washed his disciples' feet. In the grandest description that is given of his glorious character are these amazing words: "But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death." Many other similar passages in Scripture make it evident that humility and self-sacrifice are the characters which he loves most of all. Can we doubt but that in the same deep degree he detests pride and vainglory?

Not only do we find in Scripture innumerable expressions of dislike of pride, but the most fearful threatenings that it will be sorely humbled. What could be more dreadful than the warning of this Beacon against those whose self-conceit had made them indifferent to every solemn motive: "I will spue thee out of my mouth"? So loathsome and so frequent is this offense that a special penalty against it is put on record: "Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased." A law as permanent as the nature of man himself is: "A man's pride shall bring him low; but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit." A similar doom is pronounced elsewhere in words of surpassing terror: "The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of man shall be bowed down; and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day. For the day of the Lord shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty; and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low. . . . . And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low. . . . And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty, when he arises to shake terribly the earth." That would be a doom from which there would be no possibility of escape, no matter how much the fancied greatness: "Thy terribleness hath deceived thee, and the pride of thine heart, O thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rocks, that holdest the height of the hill; though thou shouldest make thy nest as high as the eagle, I will bring thee down from thence, saith the Lord." No matter what or who the people might be, the principles are the same evermore. The Lord hath a special controversy with pride, and, as he liveth, it will be terribly humbled.

Pride of heart and pride of life are exhibited in this Beacon

for the ages as a most abominable and dangerous thing. Its pompous exhibition of itself is: "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." Rich, independent, great, haughty, in its own sight; but in God's, "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." Is such self-worship becoming in one whose real condition is thus described: "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head, there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrefying sores?"—one of whom God has said: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked"? Is vain-glorying appropriate in one who stands thus in God's sight?

Then we must consider the effects of such vanity. Wealth and pride are natural companions, and their ordinary result is the indulgence of luxury; and indulged luxury leads to ruin—in nations almost invariably so. Tyre, with its lordly merchant-men; Babylon, with its pompous egotism—"Is not this great Babylon that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?" Rome, with its golden halls and mile-stones; and France, with pride personified in its "Grand Monarque," and all others of earth's greatest nations, fell through luxury. The Church of God, neglecting this solemn warning of the Beacon, fell—miserably fell through pride and luxury when in her haughty earthly head she realized the prophetic description: "That man of sin revealed, the son of perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he, as God, sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God." Such has it always been, and such will it always be, to individuals, churches, and nations, unless God by the infinite power of his grace shall prevent. For ever has it been true, and for evermore will it be an awful reality, that "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall." What earnest and continued prayer should go up from every pious heart that God would save this land of ours from a doom into which its increasing pride and luxury seem to be hasting it faster and faster!

We have given so much space to this point in the messages because we believe that this is one of their special warnings intended for these days in which we are living. If ever the Beacon had deep significance it is at the present time, and in these special points. The various warnings had their various objects and ages in view; the object and the age of these

elements of the Beacon were the points now before us and the days in which we are now living. Deep and all-pervading worldliness, love of money, pride and luxury, are the ominous blight upon Church and world, and they are the very things which were aimed at by these points of the Beacon; on nothing, therefore, ought we to fix our attention more earnestly. A very excellent volume on the messages to the seven churches of Asia has recently appeared from the pen of that earnest preacher the late Rev. Howard Crosby, D. D., whose leading thought is that this portion of Scripture was aimed chiefly at the sin of worldliness—an index of the light in which it is regarded by the most competent of witnesses. Well may we give to it a large portion of our space. We cannot but be very earnest in directing attention thereto. We cannot but repeat in urgent words: Beware of worldliness, of undue love of riches, of pride, and of the increasing voluptuousness of the present time. We are living in the age of the power of these foes to God and his gospel. There is danger most imminent lurking in every quarter. Our Lord, beholding, in one view, our depravity, the dangers growing more and more portentous, the desolations of the past and the prospects of the future—seeing all this, thus raises this element of the Beacon into the clearest light, and calls to all his people. Heed it, ye voyagers to the eternal shores, for it is God's own most solemn warning!

V. *Sensuality.* It will probably be very near the truth if we assert that what worldliness is in the Church at the present time, that was its sensuality at the time when the messages were sent. This is most evident from the rebukes administered by our Lord, for it is the leading point of condemnation in nearly half the messages, wherein the strong language is thrice repeated that God specially hates this sin, and the warning is given that lust would be followed by corresponding punishment. Add to this the terrible language concerning it which we find in other scriptures, such as: "But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed . . . . . shall utterly perish in their own corruption; and shall receive the reward of unrighteousness . . . . Spots are they and blemishes . . . . Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls . . . . Cursed children." Such are specimens of what this crime is in the eyes of a holy God. No wonder it has such a conspicuous place in the Beacon. Even though the task be a painful one, we must give it a corresponding length of attention. We must do it

plainly, notwithstanding the repugnance of the subject and the unpleasantness of exposing a blemish so impure.

Without question, the greatest of all the moral evils which at that time afflicted the Church, defaced her beauty, and brought down upon her the condemnation of her Lord, was the gross immorality which the rebukes so faithfully expose. It must receive our patient, though painful, attention. An evil so peculiarly malignant, so deep, so widespread, and so shocking in its effects, must have had some special cause or causes—causes which must be explored if we would reach the full significance of the place they hold in this passage of Scripture. What were these causes?

(1) There was, first, the old, inveterate, all-prevalent, *depraving influence of the flesh*. This temptation beset these seven churches of Asia in common with all other churches and communities. It stands at the very head of all the evil influences that are exerted by the sinful flesh. The Scripture testimony is: "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness." And these are common to all men, as is intimated in another place: "Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind: and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others." This is an evil which is specially to be dreaded because it is so insidious and so congenial to the corrupt heart. It is one of the usual attendants on a state of luxury, by which it is increased, and therefore to be especially dreaded in cities which have become voluptuous through wealth. Of itself this depraving influence of the flesh was a great foe to the purity of the gospel in these seven churches; but accompanied by these other depraving tendencies it was fearful in its corrupting effects.

(2) The *lascivious infection inherited from paganism* by the people of these churches, who had either been themselves pagans or were descended from pagan parents, and dwelt in the midst of pagan surroundings, must have tainted their whole moral character. Paganism was all dyed in lust. "Fathomless immoralities" prevailed wherever the people had given themselves up to the service of false gods. Almost all the popular forms of heathen worship were largely composed of the grossest sensuality. The hidden rites by which they were accompanied were made foul by lusts that dare not be named. Jezebel, the unclean priestess of Baal, daughter of the heathen Zidonian Ethbaal, and

seducer of Israel into apostasy from their holy Jehovah, was the recognized type and leader of all that was vile in the worship of idols. Her spirit had contaminated the people, and her doom was a prediction, according to the messages, of what theirs would be. The members of the seven churches had just come out from such paganism, and its contamination was still in some measure clinging to them. It prevailed all around them, and formed the very atmosphere they breathed. They could go nowhere, make no social visits, join in no banquet, partake of no public recreation, but pagan uncleanness was before their eyes. This does not justify, but it explains, in part at least, why such sensuality prevailed in these earliest churches—why it was the great, prevailing sin.

(3) The *infamous wickedness of Balaam* in olden times had given names to debaucheries which lingered still in their depraving effects. It is probable that there was a sect, or sects, united by that spirit which propagated his baleful doctrines. According to the opinions and customs of the times in which he lived, Balaam was summoned by Balak, king of Moab, to utter a curse upon the army of Israel which would soon destroy him and his people amid their old mountain strongholds. Gold and honors and other gifts without limit, with all their attractions to his avaricious mind, were offered him, and his heart was set upon obtaining the tempting prize. But, in some mysterious way, the Spirit of God restrained him from pronouncing the fatal words. He yielded himself to his royal employer; but all his enchantments, his freshly-built altars, his offerings, his prayers, his ascents to lofty and still more lofty mountain peaks, proved of no avail. He dare not utter the curse. The people of God were safe under the protection of the God of their fathers. To the king of the Moabites the necromancer was forced to acknowledge: "How shall I curse whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy whom the Lord hath not defied?"

Israel was under the special favor of Jehovah, and could not therefore be touched. Still Balaam, in his covetous soul, could not bear to lose the tempting gold and silver; and he contrived a scheme of diabolic wickedness. The divine favor shielded Israel from the curse; but could not that favor be turned away through the seductions of lust? Could not the favored people be inveigled into sins so provoking that Jehovah would withdraw his protection and become their enemy? With the Moabitish king he plotted that the young men of Israel, invited to a banquet of Baal-Peor, the idol of personified impurity, should be enticed into idolatry

and gross sensuality. Thus would the favor of their God be forfeited, and the curse could be pronounced and inflicted on the people who could not otherwise be resisted. Such was the infamous plot of Balaam, which was carried out, and resulted in the death, by plague and by the sword, of *twenty-five thousand people*, among them the unhappy man himself as well as five Midianitish kings. It branded the name of Balaam with infamy, and, centuries afterward, placed on the church of Pergamos the stigma of harboring "them that hold the doctrine of Balaam."

(4) Still another system of gross immorality prevailed in these cities, which was known both as the "*doctrine*" and "*the deeds of the Nicolaitans.*" If possible it was worse even than that of the Balaamites. Its darkest stain was that it assumed the name, and put on the garb of religion. It was the outgrowth of that antinomianism which perverted the gospel truth, "For ye are not under the law, but under grace." The wretched addition was made: If not under the law, then over it—independent of it—attained to a region of higher life, from which it could be contemplated as no longer binding. This was the malign root from which sprang the whole brood of antinomian heresies. To such errorists it was the summit of faith to be able to exhibit and to exult in freedom from the restraints of the law—even the law of purity. To tamper with filthy indulgences was no sin in them, whatever it might be in others. In others it might be deadly sin, but in them it was triumph—for they were exalted above the law. Such was the creed of the Nicolaitans which prevailed at least in Ephesus and Pergamos, and which must have given a pernicious impulse to the already strong evil, lust of the flesh.

(5) We name but one more form of seductive influence to which these first churches were exposed. It was probably more subtle, more general, and more destructive than any of the others, and must have come directly from the father of lies himself. Its origin was in Satan's scheme of turning himself into an angel of light, putting on the livery of heaven, and counterfeiting the principles of truth and holiness.

Practical Christianity had as its very core and central principle, the love of the members towards one another. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another." Love, or charity, was its everywhere-recognized badge. Its essential principles being placed together in comparison, the decision was: "The greatest of these is charity." Here was Satan's opportunity. What was easier or more characteristic than for him to pervert this true

Christian watchword, and make it the most destructive instrument in his whole armory? Love is the centre, the bond, the ornament, and the impulse of genuine Christianity—admit it all, and then make it the most deadly weapon of evil. *Pervert love into lust, and the victims are sure*—this is Satan's snare. Then all the ardent affection, all the confidence and all the trust, of the religion of our Lord, are turned into the instruments of spiritual death. This is satanic in its very essence; and thus it was, that the vilest passions had such destructive power in the early churches.

From these causes, either distinctly named or implied in the messages, it came to pass that such sensuality was prevalent in these early churches, and had such a blighting effect upon the followers of Christ. For this it was that the Beacon was made to flash afar such signals of lurking dangers; that such deep, dark brands were placed upon no less than three of the churches; that such fearful denunciations were uttered from the throne; that such doom of curse and death was threatened, and that terrors which might well appall any heart were depicted in the Beacon from the skies. Lewdness was the crime of those days, and would continue to prevail at all times; and all the churches ought to understand it, and be warned of it, as the devil's most deadly contrivance for warring against the kingdom of Christ.

VI. *Antinomianism.* Of antinomianism as a most corrupting and dangerous tendency in the early churches we have so often spoken already that it is needful here to add but a very few words. It was not so much an heretical system, as a widely prevailing tendency in both doctrine and practice. It seems to have sprung up indigenously almost wherever the gospel was first preached, and to have cast a baleful cloud over every religious movement.

The name, antinomianism, describes, with tolerable accuracy, what it really was. It made war upon the law of God, even as a rule of practice, or as a matter with which the converts to Christianity had anything to do. Because of the natural tendency of men to cling to their own works, or deservings, as that by which they would be saved, the sacred writers, especially Paul, frequently reiterated and emphasized the gracious truth that our salvation comes of free grace, and not through the works of the law. According to the usual policy of Satan, this was grossly misrepresented, and the law was ignored as having any binding obligation upon the true believer. The conscience was in this

way released from any claim, and the very possibility of any true child of God sinning was denied. *Nothing that a renewed man could do was of the nature of sin.* The fallacy was held that because men are not justified by the works of the law, therefore the law is no longer to be regarded as a rule of duty or evidence of a renewed heart.

This destructive heresy was the first resort and shield of the corrupt heart, and had a lamentable influence among the early churches. It was, in fact, the leading error and debauching principle. It opened the door for almost every conceivable corruption of heart and life. There was such inbred tendency towards it, that it sprang up, like a noxious weed, wherever the seed of divine truth was cast into the ground. It was the first, worst, and most deadly heresy with which the gospel came into contact. The cry of the unrenewed heart has always been: No God!—no eye to watch us, no restraint upon our lust, no judgment at which to answer, no law to bind. Such is antinomianism, no matter what name it takes, or what sanctimonious professions it makes. It opened the door to the lust of Thyatira, found no fault with the hypocrisy of Sardis, and endured the pompous indifference of Laodicea.

From that day to this, notwithstanding reiterated warnings from heaven, it has been one of the most inveterate enemies to God and truth. It exists still—not under that name, or in the form of a distinct sect, but according to its old policy, as a tendency, a drift of the restless conscience, a poison that cannot be ejected, a shield under which thousands cover themselves as they go steadily forward toward a doom which they dare not openly face. Its terrible danger lies in the fact that, while never avowedly opposing the law of God, or the truth of God in any of its recognized elements, and while it assumes the most sanctimonious professions, it still ignores or insidiously attacks the great unchanging principles that would humble pride, keep self in the dust, and follow our gracious Lord meekly through evil report as well as through good report. Its essential vileness is seen in that it must exalt self, keep open the door to the lust of the flesh, and support a standard of both doctrine and practice which Christ, the Church's only Head, has never recognized. It talks glibly about faith, but forgets that real faith works by love; it harps upon love, but ignores the solemn fact that *the love of God* is founded only on *the truth of God;* it claims to have attained to a perfection which makes it holier than others, but does not re-

member that a most conspicuous example ordained for our instruction honestly confesses of himself that he was the very chief of sinners. Such persons arrogate that they are God's elect, who need to do no more than simply rest, in comfort, upon the hope to which they are (not professedly, it may be) fated, but they say nothing concerning the scriptural doctrine that the predestination of the believer is a predestination to humility and other good works—the very good works against which they have such a jealous eye. Call such professions what men may—give them the holiest and most venerable names of love, or faith, or perfection, or predestination, or higher life, or what else, they are all but the old enemy—antinomianism—antinomianism which would take away all restraints, puff up with pride, exalt self and make sin easy; boasting loudly of all save the mortifying requirements of the Cross which teach that we must work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. Thus the divine Author of the messages, looking down through all the coming ages, and seeing that the antinomianism of the seven churches would be a great enemy of the gospel, for evermore aiming to mar or destroy, placed it high up in the Beacon as a warning that ought to be always heeded by all who love the kingdom.

VII. *Hypocrisy.* We introduce this great sin and danger here, simply because it comes in the list of the evils rebuked in the messages, and not to dwell on it at any length. We have already considered it so fully in connection with the church of Sardis that it would only be reiteration to give any more space to it at this point. Enough for our present purpose is it to say that hypocrisy is one of the things which the messages censure distinctly and most earnestly; that it should always be regarded as one of the evils that would evermore exist in the Church; that if resisted would require a most earnest struggle, but if yielded to would entail many woes on its victims, and in addition would bring disgrace and injury on Christ's cause of truth and righteousness.

VIII. *Lukewarm indifference.* Substantially the same may we say concerning this as we have said concerning hypocrisy. We have treated the subject so fully in connection with the church of Laodicea, that scarce any space need be devoted to it here. It is in many respects the most deserved rebuke pronounced on these sinning churches. Utter indifference to Christ and his cause, and that on the part of those who profess to believe on him, and to love him beyond all else! What could be worse? In-

difference, cold-heartedness, contempt, scorn—all are involved, and that toward the great Captain of our salvation, the adorable King, and his kingdom. Who can measure the affront to heavenly majesty, the insult to Jehovah—the wretched selfishness that lay at the root of all? Preferring self, the creature; the world, with its deceptions and vanities, and corruptions—anything, everything—to the Lord God Almighty! What wonder that the worst doom of all should be pronounced upon such a people! As there are fewer appeals that can be made to such a people, since they are indifferent to them all, as there is so little that is noble and lofty and honorable in their character, and as there is special guilt in such cold-heartedness toward God and all that is true and holy, so their condition and prospects are the most hopeless of all those to whom the gospel ever comes. Their indifference to religion and the soul arises from their self-conceited pride, and results in their utter rejection by God.

Such are the evils in the churches concerning which our Lord has expressed his righteous rebukes. Every minor point is not, of course, named; but these are so classified as to cover all that is offensive in God's sight and ruinous to souls. These dark spots, which we so analyze as to comprehend all, are: (1) Leaving first love; the downward tendency in evil bringing (2) Worldliness; (3) Undue love of riches; (4) Pride; (5) Sensuality; (6) Antinomianism; (7) Hypocrisy; and (8) Indifference. These are the elements of that Beacon which should warn all who would reach the haven of rest eternal.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT.

It is worthy of remark that in each of the messages our gracious Lord always places what can be approved before what must be censured. He praises before he blames. Such is his gracious character. It is more congenial for him to encourage by applause than to pain by rebuke. In this he sets an example to us when fidelity requires of us that we reprimand what is wrong, or admonish as to duty, it is wise and Christ-like first to notice whatever can be approved, and to encourage by praise thereof.

The object of the present chapter is to select out of the various messages the elements of divine approval, one or more of which is in each of them, to bring these into distinct notice, to analyze and so present them in one view that they may make their proper impression. Our first purpose was to present them as points receiving the divine approval. That would have been appropriate and in strict accordance with the facts; we prefer, however, to present them as the "Fruits of the Spirit." They are, in the strictest sense, the fruits, or results, of the Spirit's working in these typical churches, and as such it was no doubt the divine purpose to hold them up in the Beacon for all the world to contemplate. In the Epistle to the Galatians we have a catalogue of the fruits, or effects, of the Spirit in the individual heart of the believer: "Love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." In these messages we have the same Spirit's work as it is seen in a body of believers or in the public and united community of churches.

The wisdom of presenting them in this peculiar form may be easily seen. The practical effect of the truth as applied by the Holy Spirit is manifested in its own peculiar way. The gospel had been planted in that region for more than half a century, and it had been rendered effectual by the Holy Spirit as then dwelling with believers, and these were the effects upon the community. The experiment had been made for a sufficient length of time, the nature and fruits had been brought forth among that people,

and in those things which received the divine approval we have an authentic statement of what those fruits were.

Moreover, to make them as distinct and as impressive as possible, it was providentially ordered that each separate church was made to be the representative of some particular fruit of the Spirit, some virtue chiefly approved and consequently to be the more distinctly seen and comprehended. The characteristics of the fruits of the Spirit as seen in the churches were—in Ephesus, patient struggling and endurance for Christ's sake; in Smyrna, undergoing sufferings and poverty for the truth; in Pergamos, steadfastness in the faith; in Thyatira, perseverance in charity and toils; in Sardis, brave resistance against temptations; in Philadelphia, improving its little strength. To Laodicea alone there was not one word of approval. These fruits of the Spirit were exemplified in the churches as such, one at least in each; but, drawn out into fuller particulars and taking the churches as a whole, we have the following list of the results of the Spirit's influences, on which we shall dwell separately: (1) Carefulness of first love. (2) Appreciating blessings received. (3) Improving little advantages. (4) Working for Christ. (5) Zeal in the cause. (6) Not growing weary. (7) Humility. (8) Patience. (9) Intolerance of evil. (10) Resistance of temptation. (11) Suffering for Christ. (12) Brotherly love. (13) Steadfastness in faith. (14) Shunning false teachers. (15) Growth in grace. (16) Loyalty to Christ.

We may strive to depict one who was fully under the influence of the Holy Spirit, one who was a perfect man in Christ Jesus, as these perfections are presented in these messages. The fruits of the Spirit as they are here embodied, if all found in one person, would be such a perfect character. He would be watchful to retain the glow of his first love; alive to the rich privileges of which he is already possessed; careful to preserve and improve the smallest gift of God which could be made to help forward the cause he loves so dearly; diligent in working for Christ and for the salvation of men; zealous in promoting all the interests of the kingdom; watchful against weariness in well-doing; clothed with humility; patient under opposition; intolerant of evil in both doctrine and practice; ready to suffer persecution for Christ's sake; an example of brotherly love; steadfast as a rock in the faith once delivered to the saints; careful to avoid all teachers of error in any form; always pressing forward and upward in grace; and above all, and comprehensive of all, at all times loyal and true to Christ the beloved Lord.

Such are the fruits of the Spirit as providentially exemplified in the first churches, and held up in the Beacon for the instruction and excitation of all believers while churches shall continue to exist in this militant state. There are others also, as there are various shades and degrees of these; but these are the chief things approved of God, and they are so comprehensive that all others may be classed under some one of these. To dwell on them in succession, so as to see each of them distinctly in its nature and tendency, will be our aim in the rest of the chapter.

(1) *Carefulness of "first love."* As the first fruit of the Spirit this point is worthy of earnest attention. What that first love was, and might continue to be, is most touchingly described in the language of Oriental poetry: "I remember thee—the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals." "And she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of Egypt." As the tender affection of bridegroom and bride, that earliest affection should not be permitted to lose its ardor. It would be a living motive and charm which would render the whole Christian life a delight. All other duties and efforts, under its fascinating impulse, would be the purity and bliss of the soul. It stands first of the Spirit's fruits because of the influence it would have upon all the rest. But it must be carefully guarded, otherwise it will grow cooler and cooler. Here is the affectionate caution where such sad process has commenced; "Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen." Here is the door to the whole after-life of the Spirit in the soul. With first love carefully nourished all else will be easy and blissful; with it suffered to decay, all else will be a wretched drudgery and slavish struggle. So saith the Beacon, with an emphasis, through its examples, that no words could give.

(2) *Appreciating advantages already enjoyed.* Simply to understand the blessings which God has given us, to appreciate them, to cherish them, and to entertain the feelings which they ought to awaken, is a point of much importance. As if to keep before the minds of believers what privileges they had received, they are repeatedly referred to in the messages, some of them in very few words. Such reminders as these are used: "But thou art rich;" "the things which remain;" "how thou hast received;" "thou hast a few names even in Sardis." Each of these alludes to some advantages which God had bestowed upon them. Some rich in the treasures of divine grace; some spirituality still remaining; some blessed endowments from on high; some loyal

and faithful hearts, even amid so much defection. These were gifts from God which should not be suffered to lie unimproved or even unacknowledged. They contained possibilities of usefulness that could not easily be exhausted, but that, if faithfully improved, might give an important impulse to the Church. Simply to appreciate them would be to improve them. Not one of them but might be so esteemed that it would aid in the general prosperity of that kingdom upon whose upbuilding so much depended. Not one of them but if properly valued would contribute to the honor of Him from whose gracious hand they had all been received.

Who shall describe the injury which is done by the opposite spirit? The richest benefits are received, but not one grateful thought goes out towards Him to whose distinguishing mercy they are all due. They are not even acknowledged. They are not thought of with one emotion of gratitude. Received with indifference, or with complaint that they are not richer or more abundant, or that others have been more highly favored—how this leads to the neglect of opportunities, dishonors God, repels men from the gospel which has such a gloomy influence, renders its possessor disagreeable to those who are near to him, and makes his own soul perpetually unhappy. The spirit of malcontent and fault-finding is paralyzing—paralyzing to all that is good and grateful in the soul. It is not the spirit of Christ; it is wretchedly ungrateful; it is one of the most abominable of stumbling-blocks in the way of those who would build up the kingdom of Christ.

For such reasons it is that the proper appreciation of our mercies has such a prominent place in the Beacon. What a radical change would be made in all our church life, did this admonitory signal receive the attention which God designed that it should have!

(3) *Improving small advantages.* An abiding characteristic of the Spirit's work is the perceiving and improving of opportunities which the world would regard as small and insignificant. The encouraging fact stands out here in the clearest light that the small and weak and humble church of Philadelphia is the one before which the door of privileges stands open, while the lordly and independent Laodicea is to be rejected as worthless. This is indicated in a most impressive manner as God's ordained plan with his followers: "Have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?" To the same purport he asserts: "For my strength is made perfect in weakness." This is in accordance with his established rule, wherein he "hides

pride from man." "Inasmuch as God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to naught things that are." This principle runs through his ways of providence as well as grace. The proud champion of the Philistines was slain by the sling-stone of the stripling shepherd of Israel. "Riding upon an ass's colt" did He himself come into Jerusalem as Zion's ordained King. As first he manifests himself it is said of him: "He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him there is no beauty that we should desire him." So was it also with his cause, of which it was predicted: "There shall be an handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains; the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon; and they of the city shall flourish like the grass of the earth."

In the messages this was made conspicuous as the principle which would always prevail. Though in individual churches there might come times when zeal would be almost extinct, love cold, and faith weak, yet here would stand the signal from the throne: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord." There would still be some love, and zeal, and faith; and the divine method would be to take the weak things, and through them put forth the Lord's great power. There was a little strength in Philadelphia, and that was noticed and blessed. There will always be a few faithful ones in attendance, and a little grace in hearts. There were a few names in Sardis—there will be two or three at the smallest meeting. They will not be too few for the divine blessing. We can think of no special promise engaged to a crowd; but we have many to encourage the faithful few. God is not dependent on a multitude; much more frequently does he show the sufficiency of his grace to the few who cast themselves on his grace alone.

(4) *Working for Christ.* There is no fruit of the Spirit of which there is such frequent and such emphatic applause as this. On no point is there laid so much stress as on the faithfulness of those who work for the promotion of the interests of the kingdom. It is noticed in the message to each of the churches. Other things may be passed over, but this is not, in any instance. What the faithful had done in striving against opposition, extending the truth, and toiling to build up the cause and bring men to the

cross of Christ, is dwelt on in them all. There is special praise given wherever there had been special faithfulness. "I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience;" "and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted;" "I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works,"—these are instances of God's good pleasure towards those who labored diligently in that blessed work that was needed to establish the kingdom in that region. To oppose idolatry, bear witness to the truth of Christ, break up the ignorance of many centuries, arouse the stupid and depraved, meet the obstacles of a hundred enemies, build up institutions, solve the doubts of the weak and erring, conduct services of worship which were so new and so little understood, minister to the poor, the suffering, and the ignorant, and support those who had been beggared for Christ's sake,—to do all this required an earnest perseverance in toil of which we can now have but a very inadequate conception.

For reasons that are certainly wise and good, it pleased God to make it a rule of his kingdom that the work of gathering in souls and building up his Church should be performed by those who had been themselves redeemed from spiritual death. This was so in the beginning, and it is so still, and will doubtless continue so until the kingdoms of this world shall have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ. But sad experience has proved that it always languishes when left to the mere impulses of human motives. When there is nothing but the urgency of preachers, the arguments of men, and the presentation of worldly motives and appeals, all either stands still or retrogrades. The bearing up under incessant watchfulness and toil, and unreasonable opposition, after a while causes the weak flesh to grow weary, and to sink. Then are we forced to give ear to the fact published from heaven: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." And, blessed be God! the Spirit stands ready to give the needed aid, to quicken the life, strengthened the motives, and give the longed-for success.

Then the effects of the work are witnessed as accomplished by the fidelity of men, but in reality are the fruits of the Spirit of God. We may plead as earnestly as in our power that Christians shall be faithful in the needed work for the Church and for the souls of men; but only when the power of the Holy Ghost accompanies our words shall they become effectual in awakening men from their lethargy. Only when the Holy Ghost opens the

hearts of his people to fill the gospel treasury for the successful conduct of the Lord's work shall we begin to behold the day of promise when "the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose."

All this was displayed to the world through the signals of the Beacon, to be seen then, now, and evermore. How much, at the present hour, does the Church need to gaze upon it, study it deeply, and heed its admonition! Without a shadow of question, here is the panacea that is needed for the evils over which every true heart is groaning. Oh that the whole Church would see, and lay it to heart, that the humble church of Philadelphia, little in strength and few in numbers, so conscious of its weakness as to lie before God, pleading for the Spirit's aid, was the church before which was set the open door for usefulness and hope!

(5) *Enthusiasm.* This spirit is seen running through all the points in the messages which receive the divine approbation. It is a characteristic which belongs to all that may properly be regarded as the fruits of the Spirit, of which it is the very essence. It is implied in all that was good in the churches rather than specifically named in any of them. It underlies every hint and allusion that is made to their honor. This is seen in "Remember, therefore, how thou hast received and heard"—their ardor; in "how thou canst not bear them which are evil" their zeal; in "how thou hast tried them which say they are apostles"—their earnestness against falsehood; in "thou hast kept the word of my patience"—their fervor for the right and the true; "thou holdest fast my name"—their energy in upholding the cause, even at the risk of their lives. It was the same warmth that was manifested in the Spirit-prompted appeal of the apostle: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." This was the same intense spirit which induced the apostle to declare: "This one thing I do; forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

The evident fact is that any other spirit or any other feelings would be out of place and unbecoming such everlasting interests as are those pertaining to Christ and his gospel. Languid emotions or actions therein would be an insult to God, a curse to the Church, and a shame to those who indulged them. Half-heartedness in

religion is the bane of the Church to-day. The cause is so transcendently important that nothing but absolute enthusiasm will meet its demands. The glory of God, the interests of truth and righteousness in the world, the redemption of humanity, the immortal bliss or indescribable misery of the soul, are all at stake; and nothing but the whole energy of our being will do for these. We may properly let the whole world see that we are enthusiasts here. The heroes of the Church in days gone by, such as Luther and Wesley and William of Orange, were all enthusiasts. It is time that the whole Church, as well as each separate member thereof, had become enthusiastic.

Be earnest! be earnest! is the cry of the passing ages. Be earnest, for you have a special work assigned you, which you alone can accomplish. The warning from yon Beacon which has blazed from the heavens for many a century, still is, Be earnest! Be earnest, for souls are perishing, and God is to be glorified. Be earnest, for the night cometh. Be earnest, for all is at stake. Be earnest, for all heaven is watching you. Be earnest, for yonder is the crown. Be earnest, for the time wherein you can do Christ's work on earth is almost at an end.

(6) *Continuance in well-doing.* Each particular characteristic which in the messages received the divine approbation had been produced by the Holy Spirit, and was consequently one of his fruits and was to be noted and remembered for evermore. Very conspicious among these is the fidelity that does not grow weary and become discouraged. Among other allusions to it, this quality is distinctly named to the praise of the church of Ephesus: "And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast labored, *and hast not fainted.*" The words are few; but they are from the lips of our King, and imply very much.

These faithful workers and sufferers did not grow weary and give up, even though the flesh was very weak. They could not be induced to quit their hard toil by the example of the multitudes around them who at first made a loud profession and proudly boasted of their strength, but soon fell away and disgraced the cause. Though the obstacles were many, and the time long, and the work hard, they kept bravely on. In this they were sustained by a spirit that was not of earth, and upheld by a power that was not their own. It was of the Holy Ghost working within them. That blessed Power kept their motives ever bright and strong and fresh. He would not allow their affections to grow so languid that they would sink down in discouragement. That

they did not become weary with so many discouragements, and hard toil, and long watching, was a proof of a work in them which was from above. And this made it, as well as its possessors, dear to the heart of our Lord. So dear was it that he put it here in the Beacon, in order that the whole world might see it, admire it, and be encouraged thereby. So important was it in his sight that over and over again, and with the strongest emphasis, he exhorts his followers to watchfulness. On that night never to be forgotten, when he took his farewell of his disciples, no less than ten times over he most earnestly charged them that they should be watchful. How earnestly, may be seen from two examples: "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." "And he cometh, and findeth them sleeping, and saith unto Peter, Simon, sleepest thou? Couldst not thou watch one hour?" Not satisfied with this, even, he puts it in the Beacon, that it might be seen by every eye, throughout all time, and never seen without his loving appeal: "Watch—watch against growing weary." Believer, your loving Lord sees you, and ever is made glad as he finds you faithfully at your post. He would cheer up and cheer on his faithful ones when they are ready to faint, by pointing to those of the seven churches who bravely passed over the same road, and through the same toils. True it is that the way is long, and the obstacles great, and the work toilsome; still we must not give up; for there is a sleepless Watcher beholding us, and the rest at the end will be all the sweeter.

(7) *Humility.* To this point, so strongly approved and so certainly one of the fruits of the Spirit, we need devote but a few words. We have already dwelt on it so fully that we can add but little more. Its prominent place in the Beacon is all that calls for its consideration in this connection. It is a suggestive thing that the church of Philadelphia, most beloved and honored of God, was the church most noticeable of the seven for its humility. Philadelphia was the church most praised of all, and that for its humility; and Laodicea was the church most severely censured of them all, and that because of its pride.

We can easily see how highly God esteemed this Christian virtue in that he gives it a conspicuous place in the Beacon. This proves it to have been a fruit of the Spirit, and not a characteristic of merely earthly origin. It stands in the Beacon, it is divinely applauded, and that in terms of peculiar affection;

and so we are sure that it is from God. The church of Philadelphia, in which it was manifested above all the others, although it had but a little strength, was greatly beloved of God. It humbled itself before him, and so, according to the divine engagement, it was exalted—exalted on the inspired page and the lofty Beacon which all the world was to behold and admire. It shrank from all display, and that very lowliness was what gave it its chief renown. It would hide in modest distrust of self, and that proved the virtue to which the gracious King of Zion opened the door of safety and highest privilege. In the very act of shrinking back in humility it was brought forward to opportunities of special usefulness. Hiding from all display, it was raised up in the Beacon so as to be seen and specially honored for evermore. A destiny of glory was opened up to that people which without their humility they had never known. They committed their cause to God, and then meekly awaited his providential vindication and promised blessings.

The whole of the Scriptures are ablaze with such instances, and assurances of God's special regard for those who are lowly in spirit. Some of them are strangely animating: "Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty. And in thy majesty ride prosperously because of truth and *meekness*." How dear is the cause to Him of whom this is the sublime record! "The earth feared and was still, when God arose to judgment, *to save all the meek of the earth*." Behold his great regard for the lowly in heart: "The Lord lifteth up the meek; he casteth the wicked down to the ground." In the beginning of the New Testament we have the gracious engagement: "Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth." At its close we have the promise, surely to be fulfilled, that the haughty enemy shall come in great humiliation and worship at the feet of the lowly servants of the Lord. So it is in the teachings of the sacred pages, and so it is diplayed most conspicuously in the Beacon at the close—that the Lord watches over and will at the end exalt those who are poor in spirit. In that Beacon the poor and weak Philadelphia is the most highly honored, placed, so as to be removed no more, in God's heavenly temple, with the inscription written thereon, of God's holy name, of his golden city, the New Jerusalem, and of his own new name, hidden as yet from created eyes, amid the effulgence of the mysterious glory.

(8) *Patience.* Patience, as one of the fruits of the Spirit, one

of the most lovely of all the Christian graces, is presented here in the messages as it is in scarcely any other place of the Word of God. From the manner in which it was introduced it evidently lay very near to the heart of Christ, the Lord of the kingdom. The terms which he uses concerning it are tender and loving, and show that in his sight it was most highly prized. Never were there higher encomiums on it than those which it here received from the heavenly King. This was patience in its truest and freshest loveliness—patience as God himself held it up in the Beacon to be admired by loving eyes in all ages.

What precisely was this fruit of the Spirit, as it was seen at that time in those churches, and placed on record in these messages? Clearly the patience presented here was intended to be typical of that grace at all times and in every place. It was providentially of such a character and introduced in such a way as would fit it to serve as a model for the whole Church ever afterwards. That there should be no misunderstanding of either its meaning or importance, four times over is it spoken of. To Ephesus it is said: "I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience." To the same church, again, is the applause: "And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast labored, and hast not fainted." To Thyatira the great praise is: "I know thy works, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works." To Philadelphia the cheering promise is given: "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation." *Willing continuance in the endurance of toils, trials, and sufferings for the cause of Christ* is the virtue which God so highly approves under the name of *patience*. It is a word very precious to Christ, a word made sacred by the endurance of the saints. It is a large word, and covers many a feature of Christian heroism. In those first churches, where so much toil was required in laying the foundations of the kingdom, where there was so many a hard lesson of faith to learn, where the true-hearted had to go on through the dark and the untried, where there had to be such long waiting for the fulfillment of promises expected every day, where new burdens had to be taken up every hour, and where unexpected enemies had to be encountered at every step—how much was included in the patience which had to meet with all this!

In one of the places where the word is found, it is introduced in a manner that gives it very great emphasis. The Son of

man, in his communication to the church of Philadelphia, terms it "the word of my patience." It is, then, his patience—as if it was different and superior to all other forms of that Christian grace. This peculiar expression suggests to us that it is peculiarly the result of the indwelling of the Spirit, and a virtue produced in the heart by the Holy Ghost alone; that it is a grace of superior excellency which the Spirit of God always recognizes; that it is the very same patience which was exemplified in Christ above all others; and that it is an ornament of the renewed soul which shone with peculiar beauty. All these peculiarities are suggested by the expression, "the word of my patience," prompted by divine wisdom, and illustrating the marvels of the Sacred Scriptures.

(9) *Intolerance of evil.* It is quite remarkable how strong the language is which the Spirit of God uses concerning this characteristic so much praised in those early churches. There is no sentimental cant concerning the indulgence of evil. Evil is evil, and as such it is stigmatized and reprobated. Not a word is said about charity—that false charity which is so often used as a cloak for sinful indulgence, and is always a premium upon evil-doing. Not a word of apology for wrong in either theory or practice—no toleration for that which is hateful to God, defiling in its own nature, and ruinous to the souls of men. "How thou canst not bear them which are evil;" "This thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate;" "Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments;"—such are the very strong expressions which our Lord uses concerning evil, while applauding the faithful ones of the churches because of their intolerance thereof.

There can be little doubt that the evils alluded to were such as the idolatry of Pergamos and Sardis, the sensuality of Ephesus and Thyatira, and, chiefly, the worldliness and indifference of Laodicea. These, and the thousand others which were connected with them and flowed from them, were the ill-doings which so sadly abounded. These were so hateful and hurtful in their nature and tendencies that it was mentioned to the praise of the faithful that they could not endure them—that even their touch they could not bear; stronger still, that they hated such evil deeds, even as God himself hated them. This was very emphatic language. The true-hearted followers of Christ could not tolerate the evil and contaminating influences which still lingered in that region, where idolatry had so long held sway. Such cor-

ruptions were offensive in the sight of all pure-minded men, abominable before God, and disgusting to the followers of our Lord who had been washed in atoning blood. They could not endure the evil, had no sympathy with it, held no fellowship therewith, gave it no countenance, had no excuses ready with which to palliate it, and would give it no encouragement by entering its assemblies even out of idle curiosity.

It is very indicative indeed how much stress is laid on this point all through the pages of Scripture. It is made almost to close one of the most solemn of all the epistles: "Abstain from all appearance of evil." It forms one of the comprehensive petitions of the Lord's Prayer: "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." Its importance is manifested in that it is made the opening exclamation of the inspired volume of sacred song: "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful." It is inculcated in words of the most solemn warning: "And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh." And then, as if the gathering up of all, it is given here a most conspicuous place in the Beacon which was afterward to be looked upon by every earnest eye.

The course which is here so strongly approved is that of utter detestation and avoidance of all evil. The faithful could not bear it—they hated it, they shunned it; and for so doing they were praised by the lips of our Lord himself. There was no tampering with corruption; no quarter was given to prevailing evils because they were the fashion, nor any encouragement to even the slightest indulgence thereof.

Efforts made to corrupt such persons had no effect, because the evils were not indulged for even one instant. Corruptions might prevail, but they left no taint upon the faithful who followed the Lamb wherever he might lead them. When the Evil one made even a momentary attack upon them, quick as lightning, in the spirit of their divine Leader, they repelled him: "Get thee hence, Satan." Corruption in doctrine or in practice was the plague-spot which these first followers of our Lord knew to be deadly in its effects, and which they fled from as quickly and as resolutely as they would have avoided death itself. As in some plague-smitten city, where houses were marked, and doors closed, and signals given of the dread infection, so did these Spirit-taught men take warning and fly from the pestilence whose touch was

death eternal. They knew their danger, and hated and avoided every exposure thereto. And the gracious Lord approved their course as wise, and righteous, and safe. He encouraged them by the assurance that as they hated and shunned evil, so did he hate it also. He approved their course, extolled their practice, and held it up on high as a model for all the following ages.

(10) *Suffering for Christ's sake.* The hostility of Satan and men of satanic spirit to Christ and his cause on earth is deadly and incessant. Revenge, malice, hate, on the part of the principalities and powers and rulers of the darkness of this world, are unending in their efforts to destroy all that is right and pure and hopeful for the race of man. From the moment of the ruin of mankind in Eden until the present hour they have never abated in the malignant purpose to destroy and efface the very image of God. And reminders of this fact are set up at every important turning-point of human history. As such finger-posts, our gracious Lord has erected warnings all over the track of Scripture annals to keep men in mind that they are treading upon dangerous ground.

At the first instant of danger he placed the signal: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." As a reminder amid the roll of the ages, the cry is raised loud and clear: "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?" As soon as the Ransomer of the world begins his glorious work, the old enmity appears and the Evil one offers the gift of the world if the Son of the Highest will fall down and worship him. The fact is in many ways asserted that "through much tribulation" men are to enter into the kingdom of God. In the applause which God here gives to the endurance of sufferings for his sake by his faithful followers, there is warning and strong assurance that suffering would be one prominent feature of the Church's history in all coming time. Our Lord, when laying the foundations of his kingdom, would not allow us to be mistaken, but points out very plainly the great trials that might be looked for in his service. His Church would be a suffering Church. As he himself set an example by what he endured in Gethsemane and at Calvary, so would it be also with every one who should become his follower. Whoever would finally be a sharer of his crown must begin his discipleship by sharing his cross. He would hold out no delusive hopes, but prepare his people for what he knew was awaiting them.

The messages indicate this as a well-understood fact in these early churches. As soon as they began to exist they began to be persecuted and to suffer. How very significant the approbation of the church of Ephesus, "I know . . . how thou hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted;" and to Smyrna, "I know thy works, and poverty, and tribulation;" and to Pergamos, "And holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth." The same tone of praise for their endurance of evil for his sake runs through almost all of the other messages, and certifies to the fact that suffering for Christ was then the rule.

Following the example of Calvary, these faithful first Christians suffered as a matter of course—as a thing to be looked for, as an essential consequence of the profession they had made. It is an appalling fact that the foundations of the glorious Church of God were laid amid pain and blood!

But was this in reality, and in the end, a great calamity? Are we to look upon it as an unmingled evil? Was it the result of some unavoidable defect in the providential ordering? On the contrary, is there not deep significence in it that the fact comes up before us here not as a lamentation, but as a glory to the cause? Is there not profound meaning in it that the inevitable suffering comes before us in the form of applause—in the form of either praise or prediction? It was a great joy to our Lord that his people were willing and actually did endure so much for his sake. In this he greatly rejoiced while contemplating his finished work. In the light of this important subject we can comprehend the meaning of the promise which had been made to him of old, "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied."

(11) *Brotherly love.* The words in which this virtue of the churches is recognized and praised are few, but impressive. "I know . . . thy charity and service"—that is all; but how much that includes, coming from the lips of the enthroned King! The more so as this "love one to another" is praised in the church of Thyatira, otherwise so corrupted and sensual. How significant that such pre-eminent love of God and of the brethren was what Satan laid hold upon to pervert that church and thereby to seduce it into the most flagrant lewdness! What an appalling specimen of the manner in which the great enemy uses for his fell purposes what is most true and holy?

No one who is at all familiar with Scripture can help being impressed with the great stress which is laid upon charity, or brotherly love, all through the sacred pages. In the farewell address of our Lord to his disciples, on the night before he suffered, with all the depth and tenderness of parting words, he charges them: "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." Again, with the greatest affection, he urges: "This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." Many another affectionate charge, of a similar character, he gave in that most touching address the world ever heard.

These are found in John's Gospel; in his brief Epistles we find the same characteristics: "And this is his commandment, that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment." "And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." "And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto you, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another."

In the writings of Paul, who is charged with a far different spirit, we find the strongest imaginable emphasis laid upon the same brotherly love. In that wonderful thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians all of which is devoted to it, he begins: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing." Thus he commences the chapter, and thus he closes it: "And now abideth, faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity."

Thus it is that this blessed fruit of the Spirit is either inculcated or described from first to last in the holy oracles, and then raised up on high in the Beacon of the ages to be admired and imitated by all the generations of the faithful. And in all that glorious Beacon, which was evidently intended to have a vast influence

upon the future character of the kingdom, there is no element which is so bright, and beautiful, and attractive as is this of the love of the brethren. Its unspeakable excellency may be seen in the following particulars: (1) It was the banner under which the hosts of his ransomed followers were to march from victory to victory until every power would be subdued and the Prince of Peace would be worshiped by every knee. (2) It was the badge which all the soldiers of the Cross would wear, and by which they would evermore be recognized as belonging to the myriads of those who had washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (3) It was the heaven-wrought magnet that would draw the lost, the hostile, and the vile out from a degraded world, and rank them with the countless multitudes who would reign with Christ in purity and glory. (4) It was that Heaven-approved attribute through which the members of the Church of God would attain unto the nearest likeness of their adorable Head. (5) It was the heavenly balm which our gracious Saviour has prepared to soothe the ills and increase the joys of this world of strife and suffering. (6) It would be a foretaste of immortal bliss, sent down to the Church in her pilgrim days, that even here on earth she might know something of what God has in store for those who love Him. Being the chief ingredient of earthly bliss which was designed to be immortal, and growing more and more rapturous as saints draw nearer to the celestial shores, it may be regarded as the beginning of heaven, and that even before the grave has been entered by believers.

(12) *Steadfastness in the faith.* The meaning and value of this characteristic of the true child of God are seen in the praise bestowed upon the suffering church of Pergamos: "And thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith." They are also described in the charge given to the faithful of Smyrna: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." Such Christian steadfastness was best exhibited in times of persecution, when it must carry with it the greatest sacrifice of self. When Antipas and others maintained the truth at the cost of their lives, the true heroes for Christ were manifested by their following him even to the cross, the flames, or the enraged lions.

Wherein this firmness is to be exercised is indicated by the great questions of truth and duty which are at stake at the time. Never has there been a period in the whole history of the kingdom when there was not some agitated question which called for

the staunch adherence of the faithful. In the days when these messages were received, the great practical question pertained to the fraternization with pagans and paganism. The churches were located in the midst of dense populations of idol-worshipers; what amount of intercourse was it lawful or wise to hold with them? Could believers, with proper loyalty to Christ, be intimate with pagan families, visit them as confidential friends, and especially sit down at their tables, where often there would be meat which had first been offered in some heathen temple. Other burning questions for churches, at various periods, have been such as pertained to the divine nature of Christ, the total depravity of mankind, the nature of imputation, the method and extent of the atonement, the meaning of justification, and many others of both a doctrinal and practical character. At the present day there are vital questions pressing, such as the vicarious nature of Christ's sufferings, the obligations of the Lord's day, sacerdotalism, separation from worldliness, and many others. On the part of believers there must be intelligent and unflinching steadfastness on all these points, if they would be true to Christ and his cause. Had the people of God not stood up, in their day, firmly for the truth on such subjects, then had destructive heresies swept away all that was holy and hopeful for the Church of God.

Even now, at the present day of boasted light and progress, we must stand up unflinchingly for Christ's name and truth, or lose all upon which our souls rely. The ever-vigilant enemy, with forces that are new as well as with the old ones, would take away from the Church her day of sacred rest, would substitute amusements and burlesques for the solemnity of the preaching of God's Word, would obscure all that is earnest and spiritual by a wretched pall of worldliness, would blight the souls of even God's elect by the foul tricks of selfish dishonesty, and would tear away all restraint on depravity by the delusion of a universal salvation promised alike to the most wicked and to the most upright and pure of mankind. These are the things wherein the people of God are at the present time required to stand up resolutely for the name and the honor of their Lord.

It is required of us that we be steadfast to the truth whether it be popular or unpopular, fashionable or unfashionable; to the truth, at whatever sacrifice, even though it leads us into the fiery furnace; to the truth, no matter who may oppose, or how impolitic it may appear; to the truth, even though at the moment it may seem most repugnant to our inclinations. We are to cling stead-

fastly to the truth, no matter where it may appear to lead us; to cling to it simply for the truth's own sake, and for the sake of our Lord, who is the *Truth*. We may adhere to it with confidence and comfort, for it will assuredly come out well in the end. This fact, made to beam brightly from the Beacon, may well be regarded by us at every point; for God has most certainly placed it there.

(13) *Guarding against false teachers.* The importance of this duty may be seen in that it is placed almost at the beginning of all those things that are praised by the great Head of the Church. "I know thy works" is the first and general commendation, and then follows the special praise, "and how thou canst not bear them which are evil; and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars." Undoubtedly this is very significant, especially in the position that is given it.

The present and future character of any church is most intimately connected with the character of its ministers. Our Lord's care over them is made very apparent from the reiterated declaration that he holds in his right hand "the seven stars." He takes a special interest in them, and carefully guards them by his own omnipotent power.

It need hardly be said that the intention of this was not to establish a privileged or priestly caste in the Church; but the design was that those who had been ordained to deliver God's words to their fellow men should bear a name and character that would give confidence in the message which they bore. To preserve a well-qualified and pure ministry is one of the most solemn duties that devolves upon convention, presbytery, or other ecclesiastical body. When it is reflected that our infallible Lord, in a most impressive manner, committed to his ministerial servants the momentous charge: "I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven," can we conceive of man being placed in a more responsible position? With the confidence reposed in him, the authority given him, and the influence he must exert, who can imagine the evil that may be done by an ungodly minister? A single pastor, strong of intellect, but corrupt in doctrine and ambitious to be a leader, has been known to lead scores to adopt false doctrines which have ruined them and to awaken influences that are still going on to mislead and ruin.

Ecclesiastical bodies should be most resolutely, sternly faithful here. They should keep the door into the ministry most determinedly closed against all whom they have not tried and known assuredly to be both qualified and faithful. No sympathy, no personal friendship, no fancied tenderness, no professed liberality, no imagined demand for an increase in the supply of ministers, no urged exceptionalness in the present case, should bend them from the divine obligation to "lay hands suddenly on no man."

Who can measure the evil which has been done to the cause of Christ by admitting unqualified men to its ministry? Such a man has no rules for interpreting that Word which is our only guide in either faith or practice. He becomes a reproach to the ministry. He dishonors his Church and his Lord. He professes to be a guide to the inquiring—but whereunto? He needs to be very different from other men, if he does not soon grow to be self-conceited, and vain, and uncharitable; and then bring dishonor on the cause of Christ, wound our Lord in the house of his friends, and pain the holiest and tenderest feelings of the faithful.

No matter, then, at what sacrifice of apparent advantages, let this caution of our King be heeded, and the door of entrance to the sacred ministry be kept carefully closed against all uncertain or doubtful applicants for entrance. The approval, by God himself, of the Ephesian church, placed in the Beacon and kept bright and clear ever since, makes the caution most deeply impressive.

(14) *Growth in grace.* This law as to the very nature of the kingdom of heaven, this privilege of believers, this sanctified object of ambition, is also made very distinct amid the things which are here approved by our gracious Lord. The faithful in Thyatira were those to whom came the approving words: "And the last to be more than the first." It was a law established at the beginning, to be obeyed by every individual, every church, and every community. As an essential feature of the Christian life it was elevated to a conspicuous place in the Beacon. Whoever appreciates the nature and possibilities of grace in the soul will never be satisfied with his present spiritual attainments. With the greatest of merely human examples before him, his unceasing cry will ever be: "I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do: forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

From this will arise the intense yearnings of the soul: How shall I attain to more and more of the knowledge of God and of his promises to the faithful? how shall I reach a more perfect mastery over my besetting sins? how shall I rise to the experience of greater purity of heart and life? how shall I arrive at a fuller likeness to my ever-blessed Lord? how shall I do more for Christ and for the salvation of souls? how shall I imbibe a more rapturous delight in the joys of the Holy Ghost? and how shall I grow into a more perfect meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light? There are a light and a joy, a peace and a purity, a mastery over sin and an earnestness in duty, a delight in God and a tenderness toward our fellow believers, which as yet we have never reached; how are we to rise higher in them all? Such growth in grace is a possible attainment. We know but little as yet of what we might be. How are we to advance? How are we to appreciate the experience that is here indicated: "And the last to be more than the first"? A glorious field of attainable progress lies before us and the bright Beacon notifies the believing world thereof. Never satisfied with our present attainments, Up! up! evermore should be our rule, our motive, our sanctified ambition, and our untiring effort. It is of the very nature of grace in the soul that it should constantly increase in its power and attractive manifestations.

Stage after stage should be noticed as the points measuring our progress onward and upward. Communion seasons, birthdays, New Year, and other such epochs should be made periods at which we bring ourselves to task as to the certainty and the degree of our advance in spiritual things. It is the glory of the new life in the soul that we may rise higher and higher in its experience. Richer attainments are lying before us always; more exalted regions of experience demand our unceasing efforts to reach them. At no point should we pause while the example of our Lord is still beckoning us upward. The very effort to rise higher will exalt us.

(15) *Loyalty to Christ.* This most noble of the Christian virtues is noted and approved in the most emphatic terms. "For my name's sake hast laboured and hast not fainted;" "And thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith;" "And hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name,"—such are some of the emphatic terms in which our Lord expresses his gratification with those who had proved true to him and his cause. The same delight at the fidelity of his followers pervades

all the commendations of the messages. We find that gratification with the loyal and the true at every point. It is a peculiarity which gives color to them all. The loyalty of his people evidently touches his heart. It is the very glory of his service; and he recognizes it, rejoices in it, and in every case will keep it in everlasting remembrance.

The soul which is true to the Lord Christ is one that He who is the wisest and the best will cherish as the apple of his eye, and will own as his in that day when he shall make up his jewels. Without any research, we can know at all times where such a man will be found. With him, as if he were possessed of an infallible instinct, God is always true and righteous, and worthy of the soul's most exalted powers. Should the name or cause of his Lord be assailed, as with a master-passion of his being he springs to the defense of that which is dearer to him than his life itself. He needs no time for deliberation; for it is no question to him whether loyalty to his Lord be politic or impolitic, and whether to stand up for him be pleasant or unpleasant, and whether following him shall bring good report or evil report. His only thought is whether the honor of the Master is assailed; if so, his whole nature is aroused and his loyalty seen. His one all-absorbing principle is that of faithfulness to his Lord, and that at any sacrifice—even unto death. True as the needle to the pole is he to that heavenly Friend who bought him with his blood. Loyalty to Christ is the master-passion of his soul. It is the supreme principle which settles every question, decides every duty, and ennobles the whole of life. To such a man, loyalty to his Lord is the right, the true, the politic, the noble, the thing that must be done. And highest, brightest, best, and all-comprehensive, has this been raised up in the Beacon to attract the admiration of the passing ages. *Loyalty to Christ!* that is the sum, the centre, and the crown of all. Be this our aim and rule for evermore; then shall our lives be truly noble, and more and more shall they be like the life of Him who is the best-beloved of our souls.

# CHAPTER XIX.

## THE COUNSELOR.

We have seen that in the wonderful structure of the messages to the seven churches there are seven elements which enter into the formation of each one of the epistles from the Son of man —namely, the titles of Christ; something censured; something praised; some counsel; something threatened; something promised; and to each the caution: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." Three of these —namely the titles, the censures, and the commendations—have passed in review before us, and now we enter upon the consideration of the fourth, the counsels, one of which is addressed to each of the seven churches. As such counsels have been largely involved in both the censures and approvals which we have already investigated, we cannot again enter into them very much without undesirable repetition; we shall therefore take a different course in our investigation of this element of the Beacon. After having striven to impress our minds with a sense of the great privilege of receiving special counsel from our enthroned King himself for the guidance of our spiritual life, we shall do little more than enumerate these various counsels and analyze and classify them under a few leading principles.

It is quite important to observe here that, as with all else in the messages, their purpose does not extend to the more general subjects of supreme love to God and love to men. These are inculcated in other places and forms, and are rather assumed here as already understood and impressed as essential characteristics of the new life in the soul. They are as indispensable to the people of God as are their new name and new relations. No one can be a true member of the true Church of the Lord Jesus without them. They are a part of the life of the believer, and are implied whenever he is spoken of or addressed. The messages therefore do not contain much about these, but about the relations of believers to the Church. It is not so much the individual life of the believer, as his church life, concerning which the messages were sent. The destines of the Church are the sub-

ject of the Apocalypse, and the connection of the individual with these is the subject chiefly involved in the preparatory matter of the seven churches. The love of God in the soul is a subject of such transcendent moment that we are not to compare or confound it with the ordinary duties of the individual believer to the kingdom which alone are brought before us here.

The messages cover whatever we owe to the divine kingdom and whatever we are taught to expect as coming from it to the glory of its King and the blessedness of its subjects in the world. Our ascended Lord has taken the mediatorial throne, on which he reigns for evermore, and we gather around him to learn the principles on which he governs, and the services which we are to render, as his subjects, bought with the price of his blood and redeemed for his everlasting glory.

There was great wisdom in the method which our heavenly King chose through which to enable us to understand his mind on this subject. He did not simply lay down cold laws for our guidance, or announce frigid principles only; but he gave us examples which are calculated to awaken our interest as well as to inform our understanding. Human nature, either wholly unregenerated or but partially sanctified, is the same from age to age, as are also the Lord our King and his methods of governing the creatures whom he has made. In his dealings, therefore, with these first of his churches which were located in the seven cities we have a delineation of the way in which he would deal with all his churches in all the ages of time, and, consequently, with us at the present day. It is not a very momentous question with us, how lived the people of the churches of Smyrna or Thyatira or Laodicea, but it is a point of transcendent importance for us to know, from the way in which he dealt with these first Christian communities, how he will deal with us when we pursue such courses as they did.

This brings every point in the messages home to us, and makes every word in them a living reality for our guidance. It clothes every counsel addressed to those communities with most urgent demands upon us at the present day. It takes all these counsels as one body, and regarding them as the very essence of practical heavenly wisdom, constitutes them a rule in accordance with which we are to walk in safety and Heaven-taught obedience. Every word becomes a maxim of priceless value.

We might learn what the divine counsels are from the trials and struggles through which the various churches of the seven

were called to pass, because the significant "overcometh" of each message tell of a contest—the contest of the special duty there required. The "overcometh" implies an enemy and a conflict. The conflict implies a preparation for it, and the behavior demanded by it. The duties are in this way revealed through actual life and practice, and therefore come to us in a form which must impress and guide at every point.

Thus it is that the simple history of these first churches and of God's dealings with them should guide us by their mere example. At the same time, however, he has conveyed, in the messages, explicit directions which leave no possibility of mistake as to what his people ought to be and do towards that mediatorial kingdom which he has established. These counsels, differing as they do in character and circumstances, cover the whole field of duties, and form a comprehensive body of doctrines which would lead the Church on in safety, through every vicissitude, until her whole mission on earth is accomplished. Each minute duty is not specified—that would be so wearying and so confusing that its object would be defeated—but great principles are laid down which cover every point, however small, and so some one of them reaches every question which can possibly arise, and furnishes the required answer. The counsels, then, taken together, form a complete body of practical heavenly wisdom, such as the Church of God in her struggles with her adversaries requires. The seven different leading counsels addressed to the seven churches embrace the great principles that the exigencies of the kingdom might require. Coming through the living experience of these providentially-guided churches, they would be so vivid and real that they would make impressions deep and enduring. Arising as they did from actual wants, they would meet every emergency. Addressed to communities so variously situated, no crisis was likely ever to come for which they had not already provided. They were so comprehensive that they would reach down to every conceivable point that experience would develop. They would give unerring response to every question.

The wonderful perfection of these counsels to all the churches, throughout all time, becomes more and more impressive the more it is studied. Not only are they so framed as to meet every case to which any combination of circumstances may give birth, but in their nature they combine every quality needed to make them perfect. They are no mere theories wrought out by fancy and framed by imagination, but they are the results

of actual experience through which great Christian communities have passed. This feature is well calculated to call out our confidence in them, and to bring them near to us as something with which we have to do. They are not abstractions, or mere elaborate theories, offered for our cold investigation. On the contrary, they are things which have been already passed through by those who had the same nature, the same susceptibilities, and the same feelings that we have. Hence they are practicable, possible, and wise, inasmuch as in putting them in practice we would but be following in the footsteps of others—others, many of whom in that way rose to great spiritual excellency and to celestial glory.

But their superlative value consists in that they are counsels which came from the heart of our loving King and Friend. He sees clearly all that we need—all that would elevate, sanctify, and lead us upward to the glory of his eternal kingdom. He knows, through a wisdom that never errs, and a knowledge from which no object in the world lies concealed, all our weaknesses and liabilities to wander and fall, all the enemies that are likely to assault us, all the windings and obstacles of the pathway, all the aids that will strengthen and guide and animate us, all the encouragements that may excite us forward and upward, and that amidst the greatest difficulties that we can possibly encounter. And he has a Father's heart which yearns over us, longs for our happiness and safety, and rejoices in our returning homeward toward his mansions of rest and bliss immortal. He knows perfectly what is best for us in both soul and body. His eye ever rests upon us, and he marks affectionately our every footstep heavenward. He constantly cares for us, and, with a father's love, provides succor for us whenever it is most needed. He himself, at every moment, stands ready to aid us by his own invincible might. His heart is made glad when he beholds us obediently listening to and following the counsels which he gives; and he will assuredly bless us by furnishing the grace that will give success to all our efforts to attain full conformity to his holy will, and so to that usefulness, holiness, and bliss for which our loving Lord so earnestly interceded on the night when he took his farewell of his disciples before he suffered.

It was our heavenly Lord who gave us these charges, and raised them high up in the Beacon where they could evermore be seen as clearly and as impressively as were the pillar of cloud and of fire by the chosen people in their journey to the promised Canaan.

They are, in fact, to us a great light beaming down from the heavenly throne—a light which never grows dim, is never obscured, but shines even the more brightly whenever it is most needed.

In all these heavenly admonitions there is not a word or a hint but is intended for some benevolent purpose, and is specially significant, needed, wise, and worthy of utmost reliance. Our true wisdom is to heed them reverently, lay them to heart, believe them, and follow them with the utmost confidence. Even when sometimes we do not see their importance, or fully comprehend their meaning—even when we might not think, in our short-sightedness, that they are the best for us, our wisdom will be to obey. Such trusting obedience will not be unnoticed by the blessed Lord who loves us so well. Better, infinitely, than relying on our own wisdom, is it to trust in him, even in the dark. Our unfailing practice should always be to follow him wheresoever he may lead us. We may safely trust our souls, with all their immortal interests, to his guidance. It is only when in the way that he directs that we may be sure of his blessing and efficient aid. Without a shadow of doubt we shall be in that right path of usefulness, of honor, of safety, and of sanctification—the path to glory and honor and immortality—so long as we follow closely in the way of Christ's commands.

We need these divine counsels not alone for the interests of our own souls, that they may grow in grace and in meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light, but also for the faithful discharge of the duties we owe to our brethren in the Church, and to our fellow men whom we are to aid in drawing into the kingdom. Emphatically true is it concerning every one of us that we are not to live for self alone. Who of us would be willing to go on through the whole of life without putting forth any effort to save others from sin and death and hell? Who of us can endure to behold our friends and neighbors and others going on to unending torments, and yet do nothing to rescue them? Who can listen to the wail of the thousands who are suffering from the present horrors of sin, and with "the wrath of the Lamb" as the only prospect before them, and not have his heart stirred to intensest efforts to rescue them? Who can hear that most significant charge of our ascending Lord, "As my Father has sent me, even so send I you," and yet sit still in unmoved coldness?

But what can we do? Whom shall we seek to draw into the kingdom of the ransomed? What course shall we take that will

make sure of the indispensable blessing of the Holy Spirit, and accomplish that which shall be right and wise, and that will not be in vain? Manifestly we cannot take one step aright without the guidance and the aid which God alone can give. We need the direction of Providence, the impulses of grace, the instructions of the great Teacher, and the success which only Omnipotence can give. Ignorant, weak, sinful, and selfish, we lie helpless without them all. But these we can expect only in the ways of God's counsels. We can win souls only when God directs us and gives us the preparation we need, and this he will do only in the way which he himself advises. His directions are given to make us perfect in every good work through Christ Jesus. Be it ours to follow his counsel closely, and then assuredly he who gave the counsels will watch over us, and, perchance when least expected, we shall experience such success as will fill our hearts with joy unutterable.

In order that our impressions may be the deeper, and that our efforts may be the more intelligent, we will next glance at the counsels of the messages, somewhat classified and given in a measure of detail. We will not attempt to enumerate them all, but rather to give such leading and comprehensive ones as may cover this general scope. We present the following points of advice, under which nearly all the rest can easily be arranged.

(1) *Counsels adapted to the respective conflicts.* These we would simply state in the words of the messages. To Ephesus, struggling against the cooling of its first love, the advice is, "Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen;" to Smyrna, suffering sorely from the persecutions of the enemies of God, "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer," but "Be thou faithful unto death;" to Pergamos contending with the allurements of false teachers, "Repent, or else I will come against thee quickly;" to Thyatira, in danger of falling into gross sensuality, "But that which ye have already, hold fast till I come;" to Sardis, becoming tainted with hypocrisy, "Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain;" to Philadelphia, persecuted by unbelieving Jews, "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown;" and to Laodicea, pressed hard by all that the world had to offer, "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire." These counsels were manifestly pressing and important, and they were made to stand out in the Beacon that they might be seen by every eye while the kingdom continued in a militant state and souls were to be gathered into it.

(2) *Repent!* The first specific duty inculcated, most urgent and comprehensive, was that of sincere repentance and return to their first blessed experience. As so many of the churches had backslidden, they must consider with sorrow what they had done, what they had lost, how much evil they had occasioned by their example, how they had grieved the Church, and how they had wounded their loving Lord in the house of his friends. They might well abhor themselves in dust and ashes. It was a grievous thing that they, so near to the fountain-head of the kingdom, so greatly favored by the heavenly King, so greatly enriched by the gospel, had come so far short of what they might have experienced and enjoyed. The very thought of this must have cast them down into the dust and caused them to cry out for mercy, as they had cried out in the beginning. In the retrospect we can see, from their grievous backslidings, how much they needed to feel their first feelings and to do their first works.

Herein they may well be made an example for all the backsliding people of God even to the present time. Even now, with many of us, may well be put the humiliating question, Where is our first love? where is the joy of pardoned sin? where the steadfastness of the first purpose of walking close with God? where that prayer for more of the Spirit which would not take any denial? where that diligent work for Christ and his kingdom which we at first projected? How much we all have to weep over our failures of purpose and cooling of love! What bitter tears become us, as, looking back over even a year, or week, or day, we behold such lamentable shortcomings!

Repentance, genuine, deep, and efficient, is what we sorely need. We need to get near to the foot of the Cross, gaze upon its agonized Victim, and cry to him as penitent criminals; and then, to receive the fresh baptism of the Holy Ghost. That is the only place for the humbled backslider. Beneath the Cross, pouring out the tears of true repentance, and gazing upon Him who was pierced, is the one needed posture of hope. The light from the Beacon, on which the penitent should fix a steadfast eye, will show him that there may be sincere repentance, and genuine turning back from the errors of a downward way. Oh, how deeply should such a man remember from whence he has fallen! How earnestly, with all his soul, should he return to his first experience of the blessedness of pardoned sin!

(3) *Watchfulness.* It is very suggestive how much stress is laid upon this duty in so many places and modes throughout

the sacred pages. Hardly ever is there a list of special admonitions given but this forms one of them. God, who knows our need of it infinitely better than we do ourselves, omits no opportunity of pressing this upon us with great earnestness. Our dangers, our weakness, and the frequency of the actual falls of believers, all lie before him, and he urges our duty with all the intenseness of unwearying affection. Even if we do not appreciate our own need in this case, we ought to heed God's warnings. So much was this subject on the heart of our gracious Lord, that he thought of us and of our danger herein amid the very agonies of his dying minutes, and prompted by his prophetic foresight of our dreadful liability to fall, warned with almost his last words: "I say unto all, watch!"

One hopeful thing in this oft-repeated caution of watchfulness is that it would not be in vain, since He urged it upon us. There would not have been so much care to impress us had he not seen that such earnest watchfulness might avert the impending evils. Would there have been such frequent warning had our Lord not seen that it might save us?

And the danger must have been very great which awakened so much solicitude on the part of our Lord. How great the danger is we may imagine from the weakness and instability of our own hearts. They are ready to fall into the snare just as soon as the temptation offers. The enemy is most vigilant. He never sleeps, never suffers the opportunity to pass. He stands ready for the unguarded moment, and quickly as the lightning-flash he shoots the flaming dart. If we are off our guard for one instant, that instant becomes the opportunity for his deadly attack. The soul is in imminent peril if exposed even for one unguarded moment.

Then, how much there is at stake! The soul with all its immortal interests; God's lovingkindness which is better than life; that honor which is the most highly prized by saints and by angels; and the crown of life and glory and immortality—all these are the heavenly prize. "Let no man take thy crown"—what fathomless depths of significance are in that divine caution! It is a crown, esteemed the most valuable thing upon which the hearts of men can be fixed. Enemies the most dangerous and watchful stand ready to snatch it from us the moment we are found to be off our guard. That calamity, however, need never come, if we stand guard in the vigilance and by the aid which our gracious Lord has promised to furnish.

(4) *Avoiding temptation.* This is an admonition akin to the previous one, and which our Lord manifestly deemed to be much needed. In the few comprehensive petitions forming the prayer which Christ taught his disciples, this was one. So important did he deem it that all his followers should be warned on this subject, that he suffered himself to be sorely tempted in order that he might set an example to encourage and direct them in following him. From the sad example of the church of Pergamos in dallying with the corruptions of Balaam, and of that of Thyatira exposing itself to seductions like those of Jezebel, and of so many others who had been wounded and slain, the Beacon gives awful warning. No man is invulnerable to temptations, and it is the very madness of folly to stand in their way when there is not some necessity therefor. We can all recall many of our own falls into sin when exposed in the past; and we can see on the pages of the Church's history, and in the records of the sacred volume, how many of the strongest and best have fallen under the seductions of the Evil one, and these should be our dreadful warning. When we read in the Bible's saddest examples how such men as Abraham the friend of God, and Moses the meekest of mortals, and David the man after God's own heart, and Peter the bravest and truest, all fell shamefully wounded, surely we cannot deliberately face temptation, unless under some strange infatuation! After all such warnings, and after our own humiliating experience, it seem incredible that we would ever again tamper with heresies or sensual dangers. In the face of all these, what madness to venture too far on the brink of evil! Yielding ever so little is full of peril. The man that is taught of God will flee as for his life from the spot where danger lurks. The only path of safety is in shunning the very appearance of evil. The loyal soul who has learned from the Master will find his safety, and honor, and pleasure too, in keeping his raiment unspotted.

(5) *Sacredly guarding the truth.* This counsel is alluded to, implied, hinted at, and woven into every portion and every element of all the messages. Truth is one of the brightest glories of the divine character, an ornament of all God's attributes, the throne in the mediatorial kingdom, and the pillar of the universe. There is scarcely anything more foolish, more inconsiderate, or more common at the present day than the assertion we often hear that in religious matters "truth is nothing if only the life be right." The life right without truth to make it so! Life, heart, aims, all sound,

while the very soul within is rotting under the depraving influence of lies! The very supposition is a falsehood, a cheat, and a delusion. All experience testifies that it is an absurdity.

If truth be absent from its throne in the mind, then the very life, soul, heart—the whole moral being—deteriorates into a mass of impurity. What light is to the eyes, health to the body, heat to the globe, order to a community previously quaking under anarchy, that truth is to an individual, to a community, to a church. Truth is health, it is right, it is beauty, it is hope—in a word, it is God-ordained. Christ was born to be King of truth; He is the truth's omnipotent guardian; He is the Truth itself.

We should therefore cling to the truth, both in doctrine and in practice, though following it may seem to conduct us far away from all public favor, though every voice may be raised against us and against it. To the truth let us cling, for the heart of our Lord will then be with us, the hopes of mankind are closely connected therewith, and it is a throne whose pillars are made strong by the might of Omnipotence itself. As in beams of living light does this shine out, and that for evermore, from the heavenly Beacon of the ages.

(6) *Improving smallest advantages.* The fact that this element of Christian and church life is so often noticed and made impressive in the messages is calculated to impress us that in God's esteem it was of the first moment. Such appeals as these are used: To Thyatira, "That which ye have already, hold fast till I come;" to Sardis, "Strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die;" to Sardis again, "Thou hast a few names, even in Sardis;" to Philadelphia, "Thou hast a little strength." Such emphatic words as these, substantially repeated, are calculated to convince us that what is insignificant in our sight may be of very great moment in the sight of God, who seeth not as man seeth. Their diligent study will tend to make the impression on us that God would have individual believers, and churches and Christian communities, to hold on tenaciously to the little of piety and truth and spiritual life which they may still have remaining with them. They must not be discouraged because their opportunities are few and weak and waning. Even their very fewness in number and their weakness are noticed by their compassionate Lord, and should not be despised by us. Even such little things may be the germs from which the richest harvests shall spring.

It was, in fact, an ordained law of his kingdom that it should be so. In at least one of its most vital interests it was the pre-

ordered and the predicted plan that "There shall be an handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains; the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon, and they of the city shall flourish like the grass of the earth." The same principle was found in the wonderful nature of our Lord himself: "He shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground; he hath no form nor comeliness, and when we shall see him there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men." For evermore is it to ray out from the Beacon, "Who hath despised the day of small things?" Hence, if in any church the number of those who seem alive to divine things be but very few, we say to them, Look up to the Beacon, which blazes on for you! Is the attendance upon the social meeting for prayer but the two or three that feel so sorely depressed? Their encouragement may be drawn from the applause bestowed on the few names even in Sardis. Is the piety of the church at the lowest ebb? Shall the faithful few sit down discouraged, and by complaint do what in them lies to extinguish that little which remains, and not listen to the Master's call to "strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die"? Assuredly this counsel is a most important one, and needs the constant attention of all our churches!

(7) *Strive to be perfect.* This very frequently inculcated Christian duty and privilege is impressed through the messages in a peculiar manner and with peculiar force, and ought to make a peculiar impression. "I have not found thy works perfect before God" is the manner in which the counsel to one of the churches is given. It was to the church of Sardis; and that church was not wholly corrupted or dead—its members were doing something, they were working in their own way, and the Master was watching them with the deepest interest; but their efforts were defective; there was something wrong. They were not as faithful and efficient as they might have been. The pure eye of their Lord, with all its tenderness, beheld in them some sad defects. Then he declares to them that absolute perfection—perfection in the manner, but specially perfection in the items of work and in character—was the standard which they were to erect, and after which they were to strive. The aim of every child of God should be that which the great apostle held before him: "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have

apprehended; but this one thing I do: forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." The felt weakness, the consciousness of imperfections, the besetting difficulties, and the improbability of ever attaining the object should be no hinderance to the efforts. In spite of all, the standard of perfection should be set up; and stage after stage in the way thereto should be striven for in the manner indicated by the Holy Ghost: "Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity."

To aid in this progress toward perfection, there ought to be the purpose, the prayer, and the effort; and then there should be the copying after the best and most exciting examples. We may set before us, both as guides and inspiration, such noble specimens of the faithful child of God as Abraham, and Joseph, and Daniel, and John, and Paul; but, far above them all the God-man, our Lord Jesus Christ. Our all-perfect motto and invariable habit should be: "Looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith." He will guide and aid, for he is "the Author and Finisher of our faith." If he, "for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame," why need we be discouraged or intimidated, no matter what obstacles we may have to encounter?

Absolute perfection in character and work is that for which we should strive at all times and in all our purposes. Short of this there is, and there ought to be, no stopping-place. The ascent may seem steep, and the way long: but on, on; up, up, toward that goal, should be our never-wearying effort. We may not reach it, but the very effort to attain thereto will tend to exalt us in character and position before God.

Although, in this world, we shall never attain to absolute perfection, yet we may rise far higher than our fears would suggest. Certain it is that we shall never attain to so great a degree of elevation in the divine life as we might, unless we make the very perfection of God himself our guide, our standard, and our motive. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect"—be this our aim in every purpose and effort, until the kingdom's earthly destiny is finished, and we shall be with the exalted Trinity in the midst of the throne.

(8) *Have no fear for the future of the Church.* The foes are so

many and strong, the rage of opposers is so great and persistent, and the friends are so fallible and their efforts so intermittent, that it is not to be wondered at if such fears should often prevail. From this it comes to pass that the despairing wail of the passing years is so bitter and so often heard: "O Lord, how long?" And the feeling is not only sad, but it is paralyzing. It weakens the hands of the friends, encourages the enemy, and prevents all progress.

But there need be no fear for the Church, even when suffering under the sorest persecutions. Such was the comfort given to the humble and patient Christians of Pergamos. They were already suffering the tribulation of poverty, and the blasphemy of enemies; and they would yet have to endure the wrath of Satan, when he would cause them to be tried, and cast into prison, and to undergo ten days of tribulation; still they were encouraged not to fear, either for themselves or for the cause which they loved so well. The words of counsel to them even then were: "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer . . . . be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." Who is on the throne? Among all the hosts of darkness is there any so great as the Lord's Anointed against whom they are raging? They may "take counsel together against the Lord and against his Anointed," but a profounder wisdom than theirs is that of the everlasting King.

Then, know we not that all these trials and discouragements come on us according to the orderings of Him who doeth all things well? We are assured that they shall be so overruled as to make the state of our final rest all the sweeter. We have been admitted far enough into the mysteries of our King on his throne to know that they are part of the "light affliction which is but for a moment," and that "worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Let there be no fear as to the future of the kingdom; for the Captain of our salvation was himself made perfect through suffering, and, in suffering, we shall be but following in his footsteps. In the never-intermitting beams of the Beacon there are tokens of cheer and hospitality that give certain promise of arrival at and welcome to the home of rest and peace eternal.

(9) *Go directly to Christ.* The well-known condition of receiving the blessings of the divine kingdom is, "without money and without price." But to the proud heart of the unrenewed man this is the consideration that is the heaviest of all. It is giving

up absolutely all self-reliance and self-denyings and receiving the benefits as a pure gratuity. For selfish pride this is the worst thing that could be demanded.

From the very nature of the case we cannot receive the blessings of salvation in any other way; for we have nothing that we can possibly give that to our all-perfect Master would be of the least value. He is the Lord of the world, already in possession of everything, and as such he cannot sell his benefits for what is even now his own. Accordingly we have the oft-repeated assurance that we have simply to *accept*, not *purchase*. No tears of atonement for the past will do. No promises for the future can be accepted. Nothing short of emptying self of all, and coming to Christ directly, just as we are, in our guilt and poverty and helplessness, for all that our souls need and God has to bestow. This, and nothing more, and nothing else, is the one, only, indispensable condition upon which all the benefits of the gospel can be obtained. It is in this way that are to be bought the gold tried in the fire, the white raiment, and the anointing eyesalve. For all these we are counseled to go to Christ alone. The condition is simple enough. On our part, we are to go straight to our gracious Lord for all, without anything in our hand; on the other side, God will freely bestow on us all that our souls need.

Of all the counsels in the messages there is no one of more practical importance than this. It was given to the church of Laodicea, which needed help from God more than any of the others. The condition is offered, not alone to the impenitent, but also to the nominal, backslidden Christian. It is pressed earnestly upon the cold-hearted professor. It is made bright and clear and conspicuous in the Beacon. Gaze upon it, ye who are perishing in your unpardoned guilt, and ye who have lost the fervor of your first affection! contemplate it for your life, your soul, your glory, your immortality, your all in all! Gaze upon it, every soul! gaze intently, look instantly, look steadfastly—look until you shall see it clearly, feel it deeply, and become sure that you are resting your all upon its offered mercy!

(10) *Persevere to the end.* For the best of reasons, no doubt, in the economy of the gospel, God sees fit sometimes to delay for a time the assurance of pardon, even to the sincere searcher therefor; and the grace of perseverance is one which is required of those who would either enter or continue in the kingdom. The devout and profound Jonathan Edwards writes: "Perseverance is

not only a necessary concomitant and evidence of a title to salvation, but also a necessary pre-requisite to the actual enjoyment of eternal life. It is the only way to heaven, the narrow way that leadeth to life. Hence Christ exhorts, 'Hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.' It is necessary, not only that persons should once have been walking in the way of duty, but that they should be found so doing when Christ cometh." In the Beacon this duty holds a place second in importance to scarcely any other; for we see in it the admonitions: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life;" "But that which ye have already hold fast till I come;" "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation." Here the counsel is urged, over and over again, in the plainest terms; and it is also alluded to or implied in many other places. How many examples of steadfast perseverance in seeking, as well as in adhering to the faith, we have in other portions of the Holy Word! We shall frequently have temptations to relax our efforts and to become indifferent. The flesh will sometimes become very weary, the obstacles will become more formidable, the way will appear to grow longer, the seductions will increase in alluring power, and faith will often be very weak, and, tired and discouraged, we shall be ready to sit down in despair. But we must not. We must persevere in the face of all the powers of the world, the flesh, and the devil. So hath God ordained that we should attain to the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. This is his plan, and most assuredly his plan is the best, and in the end it will be so seen.

(11) *Be earnest.* Most urgent is the counsel given to the whole of the church of the Laodiceans: "Be zealous, therefore, and repent." It is given to a people who had sadly declined into a state of indifference, and it appeals to them to awaken out of that state, and to be in earnest about their spiritual interests. At the same time its call is just as stirring to all other professed Christians who are in even a partially lethargic state. To all the people of God it utters the appeal: Be earnest, be strenuous, be ardent; for it is an earnest business in which you are engaged in your relations to your God, your soul, and that eternity to which you are drawing near.

This is an exhortation which is needed at all times, but specially in these days of declension and worldliness. Half-heartedness is the bane of the Church as a body, and of individuals

therein, at the present time; and the subject demands of us more than a passing notice. Even the professed people of God will readily acknowledge that the great object of life—that object for which they are providentially kept in being from day to day, and year to year, is that they may glorify God in their passing generation, be prepared for the solemnities of the dying hour, and fitted for the realities of eternity; and yet they give to these acknowledged paramount objects of life only the merest fragments of time or thought. That earnest and affectionate appeal of their Lord, through his inspired servant, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service," sounds in their ears, and yet neither heart nor hand is moved by the importunity of divine and infinite love. Still more tenderly does their Lord who died for them beseech: "Ye are not your own; for ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." Instead, however, of heeding these earnest and loving appeals from heaven, they turn away with all complacency to the "beggarly elements" of time and sense.

Is this right, or wise, or honorable, or honest toward Him to whom we owe all that we enjoy in this world, or hope for in that which is to come? Is it a fit return for his divine and infinite love? Surely it ought to be our highest aim to serve our gracious Father and glorious King with all the powers which he has given us. There is nothing by which we would be so greatly ennobled.

And what can we do in order more perfectly to serve the Prince of Peace? What shall we do to honor our King? What should we not be willing to do for Him who has done so much for us, and who is so transcendently glorious in all his attributes? If there be obedience we can render in order thereby to exalt his name, if there be service we can give, if there be honor we can yield, if there be thought we can think, or word we can speak, if there be trophy we can bring and lay down at his feet, if there be hand we can put to his blessed work, if there be exercise of thought by which we can exalt him, if there be friend or neighbor we can bring over to his cause, if there be self-denial we can make for the promoting of his glory, if there be sufferings we can endure by which his cause would be honored, if even by death we could bring lost men to trust in him, and so glorify his adorable name,—should we not do, and think, and suffer all, in order that we may exalt such a King and Saviour, in whom are centred all the interests

of the world? The very strongest appeals of gratitude press hard upon us to keep nothing back from him.

We should never forget that we are watched from the throne—watched with tenderest solicitude. Our ascended Lord has not forgotten us, does not forget us, even amid the plaudits of the glorified myriads. The unfallen millions of the heavenly hosts, "a great cloud of witnesses," gaze upon us, and rejoice to see us gathering new laurels for the brow of their King. The tens of thousands of the ransomed who "have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" behold us as we carry on the work which their Lord began on earth, and through which their own numbers are being increased from age to age.

Then, as a very climax of these motives, we should not lose sight of the glorious prospect that having toiled and suffered with Christ on earth, we shall reign with him in heaven, and that earnest toil on earth will make heaven all the sweeter. The blessedness of that heavenly world will be enhanced by the memory of past toils and trials; by the rapture of an everlasting victory; by the sight of trophies won on earth for the glory of the King; by the contrast of toils all over, and rest eternal enjoyed; and by the joy arising from the thought of peace that shall be disturbed by no more cares or struggles. Is it not more than probable that in the endless ages to come, the glory of those who shall have been earnest for God and for truth shall be continually increased by the coming in of myriads from other worlds, to increase the wonder of the saints by laying down at the feet of their glorified Lord the crowns that shall have been gathered from other regions of the heavenly empire! Oh the destiny of glory which awaits the faithful unto death, as they shall revel for evermore in the contemplation of the inexhaustible perfections of their divine King, and follow him as he shall lead them amid joys that will be full of glory!

To all these stirring motives we are aroused by the beams of the celestial Beacon. We cannot study the sacred page without having our souls stirred, as was that of our blessed Lord himself, "Who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." By the perishing souls of our fellow men, and by the loving voice of the Lamb within the throne, we should be excited as by a cry from earth and heaven, from time and from eternity: "Be earnest! be earnest!" for souls are perishing, and God is to be

glorified. Be earnest: this is your great business upon earth—and if it be left undone you have lived in vain. Be earnest: for time is rushing you on into eternity, and your last opportunity will soon be here. Be earnest: for everything you do or even attempt for the glory of God will add to you one element of bliss, the ecstasy of which you will enjoy throughout everlasting ages. Be earnest, my soul: for this counsel of thy loving God comes to thee as directly as if thou wert the only one of the ransomed who shall ever hear its sound. Be earnest: for what is the loss of one brief day of present sinful sloth compared with an additional joy that will continue for ever? Oh, thou all-wise and all-gracious Son of God, I will be earnest; for thou callest, and with thee I would live, and die, and reign, and thrill in the raptures of immortal glory!

## CHAPTER XX.

### WORDS OF DOOM.

THE compassion and tenderness of our heavenly King may be discerned even when it becomes needful to punish the sins of his creatures, or to warn them that such punishment is about to be inflicted. They may be seen in the various elements of alarm which are found, one in each of the messages from the throne. The very collocation of the warnings and promises in each message makes it evident: for, in each case, the promise is placed before the threatening. It was more congenial for our Lord to extend hopes than to utter menaces. He would rather attract than drive. His divine love made punishing repugnant to him, even when it was unavoidable.

This is seen throughout the messages, but it is manifested just as clearly in many other portions of the sacred Word. Witness the divine sorrow as the depravity of Ephraim compelled him to be abandoned: "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? How shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim?" The groan extorted from our Lord by the persistent folly of sinners is exemplified in these utterances: "Oh that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!" The sad assurance which the Holy Spirit gives concerning this matter is: "He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." He affirms that to punish, or even threaten to punish, is not according to his inclination or desire; for he declares, with the greatest possible emphasis: "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live." He condescends to tell us that it is a strange and incongruous thing for him to inflict even necessary and deserved punishment. The remarkable words he uses are: "That he may do his work, *his strange work;* and bring to pass his act, *his strange act.*" A *strange work* it is for him to punish, a *strange act* to inflict pain, even upon those who are in rebellion against him and against the peace and prosperity of the universe.

Even we, with our blunted spiritual perceptions, can understand that the guilt of those who rebel against God, and his government, and his cause, in which is involved the stability of his throne of righteousness, must not be permitted to go unpunished. The malign nature and tendency of all sin forbid it. As a warning for all time to come, the experience of the Christian Church in its first days is placed upon record in these seven messages. "If, while Christianity was in its prime, and when its divine truths had scarcely ceased to reach the ears of believers from the lips of apostles, on whose heads the Spirit had visibly descended, and cloven tongues, as of fire, had sat; if even at that time, one of the seven churches of Asia had already departed from its first love; if two others were partially polluted by the errors in doctrine and evils in the practice of some of its members; if another had only a few names that were worthy, and yet another, none; and if they who formed the last and worst of these thought themselves rich and increased with goods, and that they had need of nothing, and knew not, that, being lukewarm, they were wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked;—if all this evil resulted from the prevalence of sin, in so short a time, then what had been its ultimate effects had not the righteous King arisen to vindicate the purity of his throne?" Hence the punishment must come, and the warning must be given. But, even when thus necessary to warn, the Lord's compassion led him to do it with the greatest tenderness. It went to his heart to give the pain. As gently as possible he utters the threat that must be inflicted unless averted by timely repentance. Instead of gloating with satisfaction upon the punishment that would come, he does not dwell on the impending sufferings, but simply announces the *principles according to which it would be inflicted.*

Principles of punishment, and not instances, are chiefly that by which he warns men. In this we would humbly follow him. The leading principles according to which guilt in the churches would be punished demand our careful, though it may be reluctant, attention. The few which follow are placed in the Beacon as samples of the rest.

*First principle: Punishment according to the degree of guilt.* This rule is very distinctly announced: "And I will give unto every one of you according to your works." We can easily see that sinful works are meant. Most certainly, therefore, this is the rule according to which God will judge and punish all the transgressors. To make it the more impressive as a warning

to the whole world, it is placed here in the Beacon; but it is also made conspicuous in places innumerable throughout the sacred oracles. As samples we may cite: "And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, *every man according to his works.*" "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; *that every one may receive the things done in his body.*" "I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, *even to give every man according to his ways.*" "For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." And the reason for this rule is given—namely, that the works are the best index of the state of the heart. Evil works are an unmistakable proof of a bad heart; and it is accordingly said: "I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts; and I will give unto every one of you according to his works."

This rule of judgment and of punishment is perfectly right and wise—indeed, in the premises, it is requisite. What is sin? and what its tendency? It is simply "any want of conformity to, or transgression of, the law of God." It is disobedience to Jehovah. It is apostasy from God. It is rebellion against the divine government. It is an attempt to overthrow the throne of righteousness, and truth, and rectitude. Its tendency is to make war upon the majesty of Heaven, and bring disorder and ruin upon the world. If not punished according to its atrocity, what dire effects would follow to the whole universe! All this in addition to its horrible insult to our God of infinite integrity, and purity, and truth! To sin, therefore, is to incur all this danger, to do all this evil, to risk all these consequences. Hence it is not only just, but kind and fatherly, in our Lord to utter these warnings to all who indulge therein. It is gracious and merciful in him to use this method for keeping sinners back from transgression, since for them to go on sinning is but to continue "treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath."

*Second principle: The punishment corresponds with the nature of the offense.* All close observers of the relations between the guilt of sin and its punishment agree that they have a very remarkable resemblance to each other. In innumerable cases the punishment is but the sin expanded into its own natural effects. This is not invariably so; but it occurs so often in the orderings of God's providence that we are justified in concluding that it is the general rule. The punishment is but the sinner having his own way, and that to an extent for which he had himself planned.

The connection is witnessed so often as to leave no doubt on the mind that this is a rule that has been established by the almighty Governor of all human affairs.

The precise nature of the rule is revealed in the words of the Psalmist: "He made a pit, and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made. His mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate." On these sentences, Matthew Henry very appropriately wrote: "The sinner is here described as taking a great deal of pains to ruin himself; more pains to damn his soul than, if directed aright, would save it." The same thought is expressed in the lines of Thomas Fuller:

> "No juster law can be devised or made
> Than that sin's agents fall by their own trade."

In his usual impressive manner, Mr. Spurgeon illustrates this point by the stratagems of the hunter. "'He made a pit and digged it.' He was cunning in his plans and industrious in his labors. He was willing to work in a ditch, if others might fall therein. But let us look to the end of the scene. Ah, there he is! we can laugh at his disappointment! So he is himself the beast; he has hunted his own soul, and the chase has brought him a goodly victim. Aha! so should it ever be. Come hither, and make merry with this entrapped hunter. Give him no pity, for it will be wasted on such a wretch. He is but rightly and richly rewarded in his own coin. He cast forth evil from his mouth, and it has fallen into his bosom. He has set his own house on fire with the torch which he lit to burn his neighbor. The rod which he lifted on high has smitten his own back. He shot an arrow upward, and it has returned upon his own head. So will it be in the last great day, when Satan's fiery darts shall be quivered in his own heart, and all his followers shall reap the harvest which they themselves have sown."

In the message to the church of Thyatira, this feature of the threatened punishment is presented in a very forcible light: "Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds." "The cup of intoxication is poured out for the intoxicated." A bed of torment corresponds with the bed of fornication. The sacred writer here threatens the adulterous Jezebel to make that sin wherein she delighted to be the very place, occasion, and instrument of her greatest torment. This *particular* is of but little

interest to us; but the *principle* involved is immortal and of everlasting moment.

We have a striking illustration of this principle in the case of the Jews of Jerusalem when, with depraved and cruel tenacity, they insisted upon having our Lord put to the ignominious death of the cross. In response to the Roman governor when he strove to deliver the victim out of their hands, they cried out with insatiable rage: "Crucify him! crucify him!" "His blood be upon us and our children!" Mark the awful parallelism with the unspeakable guilt when, but thirty-seven years afterward, at the destruction of their city, they, and their children, and their children's children, were crucified in such multitudes that at length there could be found neither wood for the crosses nor spaces on which to set them up. How often does human experience demonstrate that sinful pleasures have only to be prolonged and intensified to become the most terrible inflictions that could be endured.

Some of the reasons and results of this arrangement of the divine government we can easily interpret—some of them, but not all. We cannot fail of seeing that it must be a most terrible aggravation of the punishment of all sin. There was no necessity for the crimes which have produced such dreadful results. The sinner was not forced to such a course of transgression. He was but following his own depraved will. He was simply taking his own course. He knew—or might have known—that such would be the end to which his sinful pleasures would lead, and yet he went on. He would not deny himself the fancied enjoyments of sense and sin; and now he is reaping the bitter fruits. He has no one to blame but himself. What pangs of anguish and remorse must this add to his woes!

Still further, this ingredient in the threatening for guilt shows with dread distinctness the deplorable deceitfulness of sin, and so proves the great folly of relying on our own understanding concerning the interests of the soul, and not upon the teachings of our all-wise and all-gracious Lord. Our true wisdom, as our only safety is by prayer to cast our immortal interests upon Him who by his love to us, even unto death, has given us proof that he will never deceive us, nor be heedless of our cry. All will certainly be well with us, both for time and for eternity, if we earnestly seek for the way in which he would lead us, and then follow closely in the path which he directs.

*Third principle: Privileges persistently neglected are taken away.* This warning is given very significantly in the words: "Or else

I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place." The candlestick denotes the church, with all her accompanying means of grace; and these are to be all withdrawn from that people who will neither appreciate nor improve them. This infliction is not generally experienced at once; but comes on gradually. The beautiful plants are withered away. The springs are dried up.

Moreover, according to this warning, the candlestick is not destroyed, but removed to some other place. The flourishing churches of Ephesus, and Pergamos, and Laodicea neglected their privileges; they withered, they became deserted, the candlesticks are gone, but their blessings were received by other happier lands. Others were blessed, but they are now like the heath in the desert, and do not see when good cometh. All the pages of ecclesiastical history are filled with just such instances. Jerusalem, Rome, Alexandria, Geneva, the land of the Huguenots, would not repent of their backslidings, and their candlesticks were taken away; but England, Scotland, Wales, our own country, and many another favored region, are now rejoicing in the privileges which they had forfeited.

To have the candlestick removed, all church privileges taken away, all the means of grace withdrawn, without any question is one of the most dire calamities that can possibly befall any people. Like the ark, taken away by their enemies from the people of Israel; like that dreadful night of King Saul's life, when his accumulated terrors drove him to the witch's door, and then to the horrors of the suicide; like the awful scenes of Jerusalem's destruction, when its population raised the shout of terror at the sound from the Temple as the Shechinah left it for ever with the words of doom, "Let us go hence!"—like all these is the unspeakable misery of those from whom God takes away all their spiritual privileges. As said one of the greatest of all the great preachers of England: "Come foreign invasion, come domestic insubordination, come famine, come pestilence. Come any evil rather than the removing of the candlestick. It is the sorest thing that God ever does against a land. He himself represents it as such, when sending messages of woe by the mouth of his servant Amos: 'Behold the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land; not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord.' . . . . The suspension of all messages from heaven, the cessation of that intercourse which had subsisted between the people and God, the

removal of the light of revelation—this was the threatened evil. Every other calamity may be sent in mercy and have for its design the correction and not the destruction of its subjects. But this calamity has none of the character of a fatherly chastisement. It shows that God has done with a people; that he will no longer strive with them; but that henceforward he gives them up to their own devices. If God should declare that the sun should never again shine upon a country, or that no rain should drop upon the land, it would be an infinitely less judgment than it were to withdraw the gospel and the means of grace. For this judgment does not so much regard the body as the soul, or time so much as eternity. Some judgments are corrective, but this is penal; some are intended to convert, but this to destroy."

We should lay it up carefully in our hearts never to be forgotten or lightly esteemed, that God will not be trifled with. See how he dealt with these seven churches, and how he has held up, in the Beacon, their doom, as a warning for the whole world while time shall endure. Then who shall say that there is no danger before any backsliding church even to the present day? No danger now! Why not? With such a doom on record of these early churches, no danger now! What bond of immunity is there for any unfaithful people at the present day, with such a warning as this before us all? If such were the churches and such the Christians of that day, what can churches and Christians expect now if they persist in backsliding!

This element of the Beacon should be one of most solemn warning to every beholder. If these old churches, with their greatly superior advantages—set up by apostolic men, existing so near to the days of our Lord's own bodily presence on the earth, and with all the charm of novelty surrounding them—if, notwithstanding all, they forfeited their privileges, had their candlestick taken away, and then lapsed into almost utter oblivion—if this be their history, how careful should we be that we do not bring down upon ourselves a doom that shall be far heavier!

*Fourth principle: The persistently impenitent abandoned.* The removal of a people's candlestick is followed by God's giving them up to themselves. They would not be influenced by either his invitations or his warnings; they would not be moved by his appeals; they would not hearken to his words: they would not care for anything he could say or do; and so he treats them according to their own way and gives them up to themselves. This is the tone and teaching of all the messages, and it exposes a con-

dition of any church which it is horrible to contemplate. The warning is in fact the extinction of such a church. Christ forsaking it is a terrible thing. *Ichabod* may well be written over it; for in truth its glory has departed. *Our Lord will have the intense, fervent love of the heart, or he will leave it.*

Then, if *He* departs, nothing will be left but dreariness, despondency, apostasy, and ruin. We can scarcely conceive of anything more desolate than to be utterly rejected of God with the doom impending, "He is joined to his idols; let him alone!" Let him alone: he would have nothing of his God, and so let it be with him. Let there be no one for him to call upon in time of danger and trial and pain, no friend to whom he can apply in sorrow. Let him be alone in this world of darkness and tribulation and foes.

What can be said that will comfort and sustain a soul which has thus been deserted of God? Such unhappy man would not have God in all his thoughts, and God is only dealing with him accordingly. God is letting him alone! Alone in the world!—no one to look up to, to reverence, to love, to trust, or to worship! Alone in the world!—dashing on to a destiny concerning which he knows nothing. Then conscience lets him alone, and troubles him no more. The preached Word lets him alone, and he may sleep on without any voice to trouble him. Providence lets him alone, and has no gracious purpose to work out concerning him.

The sum of all, and the worst of all, is that God lets such wretched man alone. He lets him alone and does not hear his prayers; lets him alone to revel in sin as much as he pleases; lets him alone in accidents, in sorrow, in sickness, in his seasons of anxiety about the realities of a coming eternity, and amidst the darkening gloom gathering around the bed of death. He is let alone, and will be let alone until he shall awaken amid the horrors of the world of woe. Such a man, given up of his God, is the most pitiable object of which we can conceive.

*Fifth principle: The two-edged sword of God's mouth.* It is well known that this sword is the established emblem for the "Word of God." In one connection the Word is "the sword of the Spirit;" in another "the Word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." In the messages it is: "Repent; or else I will come

unto thee quickly, and will fight against thee with the sword of my mouth." That keen-edged sword cuts away every covering of darkness, and lets in the light of divine truth. It is the abiding expression of the mind and will of God; and through the energy of the Holy Spirit it makes that mind operative. Hence the expression, as we find it in the address to the church of Pergamos, "I will fight against them with the sword of my mouth," denotes that by his eternal truth he would expose the heresies of the false teachers who were lurking there; he would bring into the light all the corruptions that were hidden in the dark; and especially, as by unsheathing a sword, he would issue the word of command that would call down the divine chastisements upon that church because of their continuance in their sins. The guilt of that people consisted chiefly in that they persisted in harboring and so encouraging certain errorists who were striving to corrupt their faith. This was their sin and folly through its antagonism to their own, only true God, and he would oppose and chastise them therefore in a way of holiness that would be analogous to their way of falsehood. By the word of truth going out from his mouth he would expose their heresies, defeat their schemes, and give the word of command that would bring down the judgments denounced against them.

By their false teachings they were spreading the "damnable heresies" that were polluting the creed of the Church; by the word of truth issuing from his holy lips as a two-edged sword, he would cut away the foundation of lies upon which they rested. "I will fight against them with the sword of my mouth" was the solemn warning by which he would turn them away from their ruinous course. As the false-hearted Balaam and the unclean Nicolaitans were punished by the chastisements of Heaven being commanded down upon them, so would it be with these false teachers of Pergamos who by their heresies were striving to ruin souls. The word of command would go out from the mouth of God, and their errors, and they with them, would be blighted.

They had stealthily spread their soul-destroying falsehoods, but he would proclaim their vile plots in the light of day. Even in time he would awaken the sword of wrath against them; but in eternity, and before the universe of men and angels, he would expose all their falsehoods and declare their doom." By rebukes which would penetrate their inmost souls, by arousing conscience with all the horrors of its remorse, and by pronouncing upon

them a sentence of "shame and everlasting contempt," he would cut them off from life, and peace, and hope, for evermore.

*Sixth principle:* "*Come as a thief.*" This is an element of the warnings of the messages which calls for our earnest attention because of the solemn thoughts it awakens, the strong Bible language that teaches it, the conspicuous place it occupies in the Beacon, and the awful fact that the immortal interests of all our souls are involved.

There is, of course, a striking similitude in all the works and ways of God. In all his footsteps through the annals of history, in his dealings with the children of men, in all his works of nature, in the marvels of his providence, in his ways throughout the past, and designs as to the future, we may certainly expect to find the same essential features always and everywhere. Whatever his hand touches bears for ever his impress. It must be so. Whatever he does or says, is as God, and being therefore perfect it must be like him in that same perfection. We take this in the three departments of his Word, his providences, and his chastisements of sinful men. They are all from his hand, and must accordingly have some features which are precisely alike, so far as comparison between them can be made.

The alarming truth herein asserted: "I will come as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee," runs into each department of God's works and ways, and leaves a similar impress upon them all. How ominously prominent is the place given to this feature on the sacred page! Let our minds be properly impressed with: "I will come on thee as a thief;" "Behold, I come as a thief: blessed is he that watcheth;" "The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise;" "Watch therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord will come. . . . . Be ye also ready; for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of man cometh;" "Be ye therefore ready also; for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not;" "For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them."

Next glance we at some of the corresponding providential things on which a similar stress may be laid. The great railroad train, freighted with precious lives, is sweeping on swifter than a strong blast, when, without warning or remedy, it crashes into a heap of ruins, and many a soul is rushed into the presence

of its God, and many a family clothed with mourning. Unfeared and unheralded, the beautiful city of Lisbon, in an instant, is enveloped in supernatural darkness, forts and towers rock, walls totter, houses, palaces, and churches crash into ruinous heaps, the river rises up into raging billows, flames burst out from a thousand habitations, the prisons disgorge their population to murder and plunder, and the dreadful earthquake plunges seventy thousand souls into eternity in ten minutes of that awful first night of November, 1755. So was it with the doomed city of old Pompeii. On the fatal night of August 24th, in the year 79, its inhabitants were reveling in gross debauchery and the murderous sports of the amphitheatre, when a storm of fire burst out upon it from the summit of Vesuvius, and the lava-floods swept over it, burning and burying every human being beneath its relentless current. So was it with unhappy Johnstown. The terrible bank of the water-floods, without previous sound of alarm, rushed over the sleeping inhabitants, and left that busy centre of active life a scene of wildest ruin. So was it with Sodom and her neighboring cities. While the depraved inhabitants of those cities of the Jordan Valley were wallowing in the most abominable crimes, in a moment the fiery torrents from the clouds and the responding flames from the depths beneath them met, and that beautiful vale was left only a smoking ruin. So was it also at an earlier day: when the depravity of mankind had become so great that it could be tolerated no longer, while men were feasting and marrying and giving in marriage the very flood-gates were opened and, save one family, the whole race was swept away.

Such are the lessons of providence which we must add to the teachings of Scripture; and they both assure us that the incorrigibly guilty must expect the very fierceness of the divine wrath to startle as a thief in the night, and that with alarms that will crush and overwhelm. The dreadful effects of sin, according to the divine admonitions, will come in an instant, without any previous warning, accompanied with horrors the most appalling, filling with consternation, leaving no avenue for escape, or help, or hope, and dark with portents of still more dreadful terrors yet to come. "As a thief in the night" is the threat: no escape, no one to save, no ear to hear their cry of anguish, no God to whom they may fly.

These warnings of coming wrath had a very profound influence upon the early Church which had received them from the lips

of apostolic men. They were not then treated with sneers as they but too often are at the present day. They were listened to as veritable threatenings from the lips of God himself, and were not insulted, or disregarded, or trifled with. The state of feeling which was awakened by them is upon record especially in the Epistles to the Thessalonians, upon which church they made a very profound impression.

And such threatenings will most certainly be executed upon all those who will not be warned by them and turn to God in time. Even the very worst will be realized. "Sudden destruction" shall come upon them and they shall not be able to escape. They shall then partake of the consternation of the world, of which it is predicted that "The kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every freeman, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?"

To every reader and hearer, however, there is now such opportunity for preparing that no such terrors need ever come upon them. They may be so prepared that it shall not be as a thief in the night to them. No dread awaking, no sudden alarms, no hopeless cry, need there ever be to them. On every side around them there may be the weeping and wailing, the despairing cries for help and the shrieks of woe; but their raptures will be all the more transporting, from the certainty that they are safe beneath the shielding wing of Omnipotence.

*Seventh principle: Proud sinners humbled.* This rule of God's dealing with the enemies of his cause is made very distinct in the messages. The wealthy Jewish merchants of Philadelphia were very bitter and contemptuous in their enmity towards the poor Nazarenes who were following their Lord faithfully through evil report and through good report. In their lofty self-righteousness they looked down upon them with disdain. But there was One mightier than they who was regarding them, and would some day visit their deeds as they deserved. The solemn warning to them was: "Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet." This was but one warning to the proud opposers. Elsewhere are the admonitions: "Many times did he deliver them; but they provoked him

with their counsel, and were *brought low for their iniquity*." "For the day of the Lord of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be brought low . . . . . and the loftiness of man shall be brought down, and the haughtiness of man shall be made low." These proud opposers in Philadelphia had exalted themselves above the meek followers of the Lord, and they should be sorely abased. The poor Christians had been despised, persecuted, and trodden under foot; but their Lord would arise in their defence, and their enemies would be so abased as to crawl in the dust abjectly suing them for mercy. In craven degradation would they beg for help and protection in the coming day of evil. So has it always been. The proud father of evil would exalt himself even above the Highest, but only to be degraded into the devil in shame and torments. So was it with our first parents—they would be as gods, knowing good and evil; but only to bring down on themselves and their posterity every form of sin and sorrow. The rule of the divine administration, from which there never has been any change, is: "He that exalteth himself shall be abased."

How low is the degradation which these vainly proud bring down upon themselves! To "come and worship before thy feet" was the doom awaiting them. To this shame and contempt would they be exposed before the purest, the noblest, and the best,—yea, says Christ, before "my Father and his angels." Moreover, that will be but the beginning of their degradation; for by the voice of infinite truth it is described as "shame and everlasting contempt." Oh the depth of shame and sorrow and agony that is intimated in the awful words, "weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth," and in the doom of "outer darkness"! Comprehended or not comprehended, literal or not literal, the doom implied in such expressions must be horrible beyond imagination. We may not hide this from ourselves. These warnings, in one form or another, are spread all over the messages here sent to the churches. The Beacon of the ages flashes afar the lurid light in which they shine, and holds it up so high that it must be seen by every eye.

*Eighth principle: Certain sins punished in this world.* Among the many solemn truths conveyed in these messages, this is momentous and urgent. It is found, not exclusively, but chiefly, in connection with the church of Thyatira. The great crime laid to the charge of that people was their indulgence in the sin of uncleanness, and the threat against them was that, as in the case

of Jezebel of ancient infamy, they should be made to suffer the consequences of their lewdness even in time. The sin laid to their charge was: "Thou sufferest that woman [using figurative language] Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrified unto idols." The punishment threatened against them was: "Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and the hearts."

This seems to have been established as a rule of the divine government concerning certain sins of peculiar atrocity. It was not made the general principle of punishment; for that would have interfered with the great purposes of God in the punishing of transgressions. It was rather intended as a deeper brand reserved for stamping guilt of a peculiar vileness. The Bible abounds in instances precisely like this of the messages. In addition to the case of Jezebel, here cited, whose life was trampled out by the horses' hoofs, we have also those of Balaam mangled on the slaughter-field of Moab, of the Laodiceans whose beautiful city was turned into a wild wilderness of ruins, of Ananias and Sapphira instantly turned to corpses because of their lies to the Holy Ghost, and of many others.

The pages of profane history abound in just such sad instances. In that treasury of practical godliness, *The Morning Exercises*, we have the principle finely illustrated under the description of conscience, of which it is said: "Conscience cannot be ejected, either by force or by fraud, so deeply has it seated itself in the human breast. Though the man be quite safe he feels himself to be insecure. Even in solitude he is full of anxiety, and his whole frame is seized with trembling. Wickedness is afraid even when concealed in the deepest darkness. . . . . What ails the great emperors of the world that causes them such profound terror as they cannot shake off? What ails them to tremble with such inward consternation? Is it a vain fear? Then why do they not shake it off? Is it the fear of men? No; they are above human punishments. Is it the fear of shame? No, the sin was so secret that no eye could possibly see it. What is the matter? Oh, they are haunted by the fury of their own consciences!" One of the most impressive examples of this kind which all the annals of the world have to offer was that of the Roman emperor Tiberius.

He was master of the whole world, and had nothing to fear from men, and yet he thus wrote to the Roman senate: "What to write, Conscript Fathers—in what terms to express myself, or what to refrain from writing—is a matter of such perplexity, that if I knew how to decide, may the just gods, and the goddesses of vengeance, doom me to die in pangs worse than those under which I linger every day." He was so tortured in the present by a guilty conscience that his historian sums up concerning him: "Neither the imperial dignity, nor the gloom of solitude, nor the rocks of Capreæ, could shield him from himself. He lived on the rack of guilt, and his wounded spirit groaned in agony."

Among the crimes which seem to be especially marked for punishment in this life are these three—namely, lewdness, opposition to the Church and her ministers, and the sin against the Holy Ghost. As to the guilt of lewdness, the marks set upon it are so plain that it is not possible for them to be mistaken. They are deeply branded in upon at least two of these seven churches. Concerning it the not exaggerated language of Mr. Barnes is: "'I will cast her into a bed.' Not a bed of ease, but a bed of pain. The harlot's bed and a sick-bed are thus brought together, as they are often, in fact, in the dispensations of Providence and the righteous judgments of God. One cannot be indulged without leading on, sooner or later, to the horrid sufferings of the other—and how soon no one knows. . . . . 'Into great tribulation.' . . . Great suffering, disease of body or torture of the soul, or both. How often—how almost uniformly is this the case with those who thus live! Sooner or later, sorrow always comes upon the licentious; and God has evinced by some of his severest judgments, in forms of frightful disease, his displeasure at the violation of the laws of purity. There is no sin that produces a more withering and desolating effect upon the soul than that which is here referred to; none which is more certain to be followed by sorrow."

Equally manifest is it that persistent opposition to the cause of God and his faithful ministerial servants is a sin which he specially notices and visits even in this life. It is on the very surface of the records of all churches that God does not hold such persons guiltless even here. True, this world is not the place of retribution; but there are exceptions, wherein the divine displeasure is manifested against certain sins that are peculiarly heinous. If Paul knew that the prevailing sickness and frequent deaths among the Christians of Corinth were a judgment from

God on account of the irreverent manner in which they had celebrated the Lord's Supper, is it not certain that similar judgments may be witnessed in the Church at the present time? Warring against God's Church and his servants is undoubtedly a similar offénse, and may bring down similar punishment. Many such cases are on record and should give warning. It is a most dangerous thing to war against Christ and his servants.

The sin against the Holy Ghost is another crime which, in the sight of God, is peculiarly odious—so odious as to be sometimes visited in this world, and leave no hope of forgiveness. Christ, as we read, had been endued by the Holy Ghost, and thereby, as a man, among other things, wrought the miracle of casting out devils. This the blaspheming scribes from Jerusalem misconstrued, and insulted that sacred Spirit in him by stigmatizing it as the spirit of the devil, with horrid impiety asserting: "He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth he out devils." This, even our gracious Lord declares to be the sin against the Holy Ghost, in the awful words: "Verily I say unto you, all sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme; but he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation." Such blasphemer is therefore doomed to hopeless perdition before he has entered the eternal world.

Doubtless there was an important end to be accomplished in this arrangement by which certain atrocious sins are punished in the present time, when men can see it and realize the evil of transgression, and understand the consequences of guilt, even before the horrors of eternal death have been entered upon. The world is thereby made to see that its Lord has not deserted it, but is even now watching over the righteous, and sometimes inflicting his just retribution upon the guilty. The point is admirably presented by some anonymous writer: "If no sin were punished here, no providence would be believed; if every sin were punished here, no judgment would be expected." How awfully impressive does this make the warning from heaven that our God of righteousness and justice and truth is not to be trifled with! It is an emphatic condemnation of the folly of the course of those persons who, "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." For such reasons as these this warning is placed here with its dread conspicuousness in the Beacon.

*Ninth principle: Utter rejection by God the doom of the lukewarm.* Under the church of Laodicea we have dwelt on this point so fully that much less will be called for here.

The sin condemned, the peculiar figure that is used, and the location given it among the other threatenings, all go to show that the offense was peculiarly odious in the sight of God. No matter what we think of it, this is its aspect before God, and this is the solemn truth as to the enormity of its guilt, and as to the dread punishment that awaits it. The appearance of the sin in God's sight is expressed in this strong language of condemnation: "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So, then, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." How could words be more cutting—"I would thou wert cold or hot!" Then, this threatening stands at the close of the list, as if it were the very climax of the sins to be found in any of the churches. Evidently there was no other sin of them all so repulsive to the loving heart of our Lord. Whatever cold-heartedness, or half-heartedness, or indifference is to us, there can be no question as to what that is before God of which he declares to those guilty thereof, "I will spue thee out of my mouth."

The sin of which this people of Laodicea were guilty was one that was utterly disgusting in the sight of God. His heart, so faithful and loving and true, could not bear it. He therefore warns them in the plainest and most emphatic words that if they continued in their indifference he would cast them out as too absolutely nauseous to be endured. To make the warning the more urgent he uses a figure by which the world has agreed to express that which is the most hateful—a figure that embraces the sum of all disgusting things. No other language of which we can conceive would imply such utter loathsomeness. It signifies that the Lord of perfect holiness would eject those who were guilty of this sin from his regard and turn away from them as utterly unworthy and abominable.

This is not the light in which mankind regard this sin—if indeed they admit it to be a sin at all. No doubt it was not the esteem in which it was held by the backsliding, cold-hearted Laodiceans. They very probably regarded this severe charge against them as an insult and a wrong. Such persons would deny that they were conscious of any hostile feelings against their God. They neither say nor do anything in opposition to his cause. They are only indifferent, and that surely is their own business. Such

is their salve to a conscience that will still not let them alone; and so they go on insulting their Maker and imperiling their souls.

But what is its appearance in the sight of God—that God with whom we have to do in all our most vital interests, and in whose hands is our everlasting destiny? The figurative language used indicates most clearly that God has towards such lukewarmness a most extraordinary dislike. There is implied in it offensiveness, disgust, loathing, and the prospect of utter repudiation. The language is such that it would not be possible for us to exaggerate its import. Let it be noted that this is God's estimate of indifference to his cause, and the soul, and his messages, and, above all, to him—our Creator, Preserver, Redeemer, and Judge. How can we conceive of anything worse, or more to be dreaded, than the doom of abhorrence expressed in this figure?

It is no wonder that such utter indifference as renders men neither hot nor cold in religion should be so repulsive to the whole nature of our pure, all-wise and all-gracious Lord. If we take a thoughtful survey of the matter we shall see that it must be so. We shall see that such cold-heartedness is shockingly foolish; that such state of heart reveals a degree of depravity that is deep and dreadful; that it is sadly perilous as exposing us to eternal death and woe; that it exhibits a horrid selfishness and unconcern as to the souls of our fellow men; that it tends to do all that in us lies to thwart the gracious purposes of our God in setting up the divine kingdom in the world; that it is basely dishonoring to the example of our dear Lord who suffered even to the death of the cross for that cause which we treat with such contemptuous unconcern; that it is the most wretched ingratitude towards the infinite love of God who has done so much to secure to us that salvation that would elevate us from a condition of death and misery to one of life and glory and bliss; that it is the foulest and blackest insult to our Father in heaven, on whom we turn our backs in scorn; that it is a poor, pitiable rebuke to our adorable Lord, by setting at naught that sublime enterprise which calls forth the greatness of his infinite perfections; and that it is horribly disobedient and rebellious for us to be thus indifferent, since he has laid upon us the one all-absorbing charge: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." Can we take even the slightest glance at these real, true and solemn considerations without our very souls being crushed to the dust by the thought that we should be lukewarm regarding such momentous things? Can we wonder

that such a fearful punishment should be denounced against a crime so flagrant in the sight of a God of infinite purity and goodness? Is not this darkness of the guilt the reason why such a strangely ominous figure is used? The image is intensely strong, and denotes deep disgust and loathing at the indifference which prevailed in the church of Laodicea. So will it also be with all churches, and all professing Christians. When they become lukewarm, they have special reason to dread the indignation of their Saviour. Because of this it is that all is summed up in a doom that must send a chill to every thoughtful heart: "They shall awake to *shame and everlasting contempt*."

In concluding this chapter it may be summed up that from these words of threatened condemnation, at least one of which is addressed to each of the seven churches, we have a marvelously complete delineation of the threatened punishments which are awaiting all the enemies of God. No one of the seven elements that constitute the messages is so thoroughly exhaustive as this. The whole subject is covered in at least its most essential features. Not that each one of the punishments that shall be inflicted upon the wicked is distinctly enunciated; but the principles according to which the final doom will be inflicted are stated so clearly as to be easily comprehended. Each of these principles is so presented as to cover a whole class of sins, with the threatened punishment that will follow. They reach every class of sin and threatened doom thereupon, and yet the words of doom are but one of the seven elements of the messages, and the messages themselves are all contained in two chapters of the sacred pages. Could mere human skill have framed such a composition?

A brief recapitulation of the principles of the warnings will make all this the more striking, and, presented in one comprehensive view, will make the words of doom appear the more awfully solemn and just. 1. The punishment will be severe in proportion to the degree of guiltiness. 2. The punishment will correspond in its nature with the nature of the offenses committed. 3. Privileges, when persistently neglected, will be taken away. 4. The stubbornly impenitent will be abandoned of God. 5. As with a sword of double edge, the voice of God will strike terror into the souls of those who fight against him. 6. As the terrors of a thief in the night, will the horrors of the judgment come suddenly upon the guilty. 7. The proudest of foes shall be humbled into the very dust. 8. Certain sins are so atrocious in the sight

of God that they shall be visited by divine wrath even in this present time. 9. Utter rejection by God will be the horrible doom of those who are so guilty as to continue in wretched indifference. These principles, according to which the guilty will be judged and punished, cover the whole subject in a marvelously comprehensive manner, and they are all placed in the clear light of the Beacon, in order that they may be seen by every transgressor, and that, if it be possible, he may be warned away from his perilous course before it be for ever too late.

# CHAPTER XXI.

## CORDS OF LOVE; OR, PROMISES IN THE MESSAGES.

A CAREFUL analysis of the several promises in these messages to the seven churches will show that in each element of each promise there are certain things which are identical, and among such peculiarities we may enumerate the following:

(1) *To each church there are two messages—one which is local, intended for that church alone, and one which is general and equally applicable to all churches of all places and ages.* The first cannot have any significance excepting to that particular church. It arises from its history and character, and is framed according to certain objects and facts of the place. Being thus of local import, we have little else to do with it save to study it as a beautiful instance of God's benevolence and wisdom. The other promise is general in its import and character, and looks forward to all churches of all times. It is applicable to us of the present age, as fully as if there was not another church in the world to hear it. It is of such vital import that we should endeavor to reach its deepest meaning, and then take it home to ourselves as the joy and guide of our whole lives.

(2) *The promises are all diverse from each other.* No two of them are precisely alike in either their import, their emblems, or the manner in which they are constructed. This is the more remarkable in that so many of them hold out substantially the same hopes, and impart instructions which are so similar. A very impressive writer on this portion of Scripture has well said: "The promises of future blessedness to the faithful are couched in different terms in the address to each church, and many of them under metaphors which occur nowhere else in the sacred writings." Thus, to Ephesus, we have "the tree of life;" to Smyrna, "a crown of life," the complement of the crown of martyrdom; to Pergamos, "the hidden manna" and "the white stone;" to Thyatira, where the heathen were given to the worship of Apollo, "the morning star;" to royal Sardis, "the white raiment;" and to the faithful of Philadelphia is the pledge given: "Him that

overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out." Thus can it be most easily seen that to the loyal and true of each church there is a different and special pledge of God's richest gifts.

(3) *The promises here given in germ are expanded in the body of the Apocalypse.* The germs are here, the full developments are depicted afterwards.

This fact is worthy of being presented in detail. In the promises we have, "He that overcometh the same shall be *clothed in white raiment;*" in the revealed fulfillment, "And upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, *clothed in white raiment.*" In the promise it is, "*And in the stone a new name written;*" in the fulfillment, "And with him an hundred and forty and four thousand, having his Father's *name written in their foreheads.*" In the promise we have, "*I will give to eat of the tree of life;*" in the body of the Apocalypse it is, "In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there *the tree of life.*" In the promise it is, "He that overcometh *shall not be hurt of the second death;*" in the accomplishment it is, "And death and hell shall be cast into *the lake of fire.*" Thus is it throughout the whole of the book; in the messages at the beginning we have the germ, the embryo in promise; then afterwards, in the body of the book, we have the full and blessed fulfillment.

(4) *The promises are conveyed in figurative language, and through emblems formed by some objects found in the various cities.* This is one of their striking and beautiful features. To the Ephesians, familiar with the splendid groves around their temple, was the pledge that they should eat of the tree of life; to the faithful of Smyrna, who were witnesses of the cruel death of so many martyrs, was the assurance that they should not be hurt of the second death; to the believers of Pergamos, around whose walls lay thousands of white pebbles, was the engagement that they should receive the white stone with the new name; to the Christians of Thyatira, familar with the image of Apollo, the God of the sun, was the promise that they would receive the Morning Star; to the church of Sardis, the most splended city then in existence, did their Lord engage that they would be clothed in white as citizens of the New Jerusalem; to the humble followers of Christ in Philadelphia, contemned and oppressed by haughty Jewish enemies, was the prospect extended that those very enemies would come crouching and worshiping at their feet;

and to the brave followers of Christ who stand firm amid the blighting influences of Laodicea was the assurance granted that they would have an honored seat on the throne of life and glory. By this peculiarity of the promises in the messages, they were the better understood and appreciated. They were brought the nearer home to them, as something with which they would actually have to do, something that was intended for them. Every promise was made the dearer and more precious as actually awaiting them in the future.

(5) *The promises are given in the form of rewards.* "To him that overcometh, will I give to eat of the tree of life;" "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life;" "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna;" "I will give to every one of you according to his works." The whole tone and drift of the promises are of this character, indicating that they are given as a reward of fidelity to those who prove true to their Lord. The same characteristic pervades all Scripture. It is brought out with special force in our Lord's description of the decisions of the Last Day. After the King pronounces the "Come, ye blessed of my Father," he gives the grounds of the acquittal: "For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in; naked, and ye clothed me; I was sick, and ye visited me; I was in prison, and ye came unto me." The blessed doom was all as a recompense.

What God gives or promises to give to the faithful is still spoken of as a recompense. Whatever be their inner thought or purpose, they are not tossed to us in form as if they were a charity and with a grudge; but bestowed as if we had some right and they were an honor. True, we could not merit them in the strict sense of that term, and as if they were in payment of some claim of ours. This could not be. They are not in payment to us; but they are recompenses to Christ for his stupendous achievement on the cross, and then he distributes them to us in the same form. As an increase of their blessedness, for his sake they are distributed to us—as a remuneration for what he has done. How vastly are the promises thereby increased in value! Their very nature is changed; and they are bestowed as if they were the recompense of our merit. Our dear Lord so thoroughly identifies himself with us and our interests as to share his own merits with us in this manner. He entitles us to go before the throne and claim the riches of heaven as the reward of fidelity. This we can do even

as following his example: "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame; and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

(6) *The character of the promises in each case corresponds with the character of the church to which they are given.* This point is so admirably presented by Dean Trench in his excellent work on the seven churches that we will cite his words in full: "It is deeply interesting and instructive how in this, and probably in every other case, the character of the promise corresponds to the character of the faithfulness displayed. They who have abstained from the idol meats, from the sinful dainties of the flesh and the world, shall in return eat of the tree of life; or, as it is in the epistle to Pergamos, of the hidden manna,—the same law of correspondency and compensation being found to reign in most, if not in all the other promises as well. They who have not feared those who can kill the body only,—who have given, where need was, their bodies to the flames, shall not be hurt by the second death. They whom the world has not vanquished shall have dominion over the world. They who here keep their garments undefiled shall be clad in the white and shining garments of immortality there. They who overcome Jewish pretensions shall be made free, not of an earthly, but of a heavenly, Jerusalem."

(7) *In each promise there is a higher degree of blessedness assured than in the preceding one.* There is an ascending scale whereby the promises, beginning at the lowest, rise higher and higher, until the very highest conceivable is reached. There is a progress from first to last, step by step, until we are led up to the throne of the Triune Jehovah.

We cannot but admire the skill by which, though the promises are taken in the order of the churches, yet are they so arranged as to form this splendid progress from the lowest up to the highest.

Most assuredly this is not without a definite purpose. What is it? Obviously, at first glance, it is to make upon us a more adequate impression of the inexhaustible love of God, which, even after the most profound research, "passeth knowledge." It is to open to our view some of the otherwise closed avenues of bliss which God has in store for those who love him. It is to cast some rays of light upon the fathomless meaning of our Lord, when to his troubled disciples he declared: "I go to prepare a place for you." This is a part of that preparation; a part of

what he has been doing during the long centuries in which he has been in the regions of glory preparing for his people a home of unspeakable blessedness.

We see from it all how fully the heart of our Lord is set upon the endless happiness of his blood-bought followers. The full body of that bliss cannot as yet be seen or comprehended by us, but he would give us these glimpses thereof. He would reveal to us some of its various aspects, that we may form a right conception of the full body of that heavenly glory which is hereafter to be revealed. Mortal eye has not seen it all, nor could it endure the sight, were the full blaze of its glory opened before it; but here its various elements are exposed with such progressive brightness, that we can look upon them, gaze steadfastly, wonder, and adore. Be it now our blessed effort to study these successive stages of promised glory, as we find them announced in these messages.

*First degree of promised glory: Immortality.* The loss of man's immortality was the great disaster of the Fall, and the symbol and seal of that loss was in the exclusion of the fallen race from eating of the tree of life. The warning by which life eternal had been guarded was concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil: "In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." They disobeyed, they ate, they were lost, their immortality was gone; and the seal of their doom was affixed in their banishment from the tree of life: "So he [God] drove out the man, and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, *to keep the way of the tree of life.*" That was their spiritual death. They fell, were excluded from Paradise, and of the tree of life they would never more be allowed to eat. The essence and emblem of the original curse of death was exclusion from the tree of life. That was death itself. Then the tree of life disappears and remains unseen for centuries of sin, while the fallen race, though spiritually dead, sinned and suffered on in their lost estate.

Meantime, however, the purposes of God ripened, and the promised Deliverer appears, teaches, suffers, dies, and rises again as the Conqueror of death—and the ruin of the Fall is repaired. That gracious achievement is announced in proclamation from the divine throne that the seal is broken, and the way to the tree of life is open again. It was hidden; but now, in the first of these seven messages, is heard the promise: "*To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life.*" Thus was the

loss of the Fall to be repaired. Immortality was lost, but thus was it restored. The promise was a very simple one: "He shall eat of the tree of life." That is the whole promise. It is brief; but it is significant and complete. With the loss of the tree of life comes the loss of immortality. Whatever may have been the connection between them, it is certain that the two events came together. Then, on the contrary, the animating fact is manifest that the restoration of the two was simultaneous; the promise of restored immortality is signalized by restored access to the tree of life. To eat of the tree of life is to live for evermore. But that life carries with it the concomitants of life, such as joy, and love, and activity, and all else which its glorious Author established as the very essence of life. All these are included in the first blessed engagement—"will I give to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God."

*Second degree:* "*He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.*" The second death is the death of the soul—the death which is to be the doom of the lost after that first, temporal death of which we are now witnesses; that awful death to which there will never be an end. Its character is made terribly plain in two passages of Holy Writ the meaning of which it is not possible for us to mistake. One of them was uttered by our gracious Lord himself: "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." The other is to be the dreadful doom of the enemies of God, made known as a warning to every soul of mankind: "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death." The meaning and intent of this cannot be mistaken. The horrors implied cannot be exaggerated, especially when it is remembered that the words come from the heart of Him who wept so bitterly over the threatened doom that was impending over the irreclaimable Jerusalem.

Such was the second death, and the great promise made to the faithful in Smyrna was that they should not even receive any hurt therefrom. It was a promise peculiarly significant to that people who were bleeding from the cruel wounds of the persecutors. How full of comfort it must have been to them as they saw neighbors and relatives slaughtered without mercy because they would not deny their Lord; their beloved and

venerated bishop Polycarp roasted in the flames because he would not insult the memory of that gracious Saviour who was all in all to him. What to them were a few pangs for a few moments only, while they had the assurance from the God of infinite truth himself that not one pang for even an instant would come upon them from the second death. A few moments of suffering might be endured, but then would follow perfect and endless joys, which Omnipotence itself would guard, and endless ages would never dim. Let them be faithful but for a few brief moments, and then all the malice of Satan, and all the plans of the powers of darkness, could never harm them even for an instant. Their safety would be perfect and endless. They could not be destroyed—they would *not even be hurt* by the second death. But this was not all; it was not even the real point and zest of the engagement made to this faithful people. It was the deliverance wrought in the extreme moment of danger, the snatching from the very brink of the pit, the safety brought at the last instant when all hope seemed gone, the triumph when all seemed lost—it was this which was embodied in this promise so marvelous; perfect immunity at the instant when it seemed certain that friend or help there could be none. The three righteous heroes who were cast into the fiery furnace of Babylon are, perhaps, the best scriptural illustration of it. The enemies were malignant; the king was in a fury and without restraint; the furnace was heated into seven times greater rage; not a friend was to be found; the servants of God were thrown by the mightiest men of the empire into the merciless flames. The heavenly Deliverer comes. "Behold, four men, loose, walking composedly in the midst of the fire"—no hurt of any kind upon them! The fire had no power over their bodies; a hair of their heads was not singed! Their clothing was not touched; not even the smell of fire had passed upon them.

This glorious deliverance for the faithful people of God is thus most impressively set before us in this blessed promise to the church of Smyrna. In the immediate future there lay before them a dreadful prospect. Satan was plotting against them with all his malignant artifice. He would have some of them cast into prison. Their fidelity would be tested to the very utmost. For a time they would be in the greatest tribulation. Many of them would be slain, and that in a manner most cruel. Nothing is concealed from them; they were to know all. All that the flesh dreaded was before them; *but, with the trial would also come the deliverance.* They needed not to dread the sufferings; for

their triumphant escape would be certain and complete, according to the pledge of their Lord of infinite power and truth.

This it is that constitutes the very essence and rapture of the second promise of the seven, that raises it to a degree above the preceding one, and that gives it its position in the ascending progress. The speedy and sure deliverance, when all else would seem hopeless, and the unexpected triumph which breaks out in the shout of victory: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"—this it is which constitutes its peerless glory. This it is which puts on it its crown—the crown of joy, and truth, and glory.

*Third degree: Sacred, inviolable, and everlasting friendship.* We consider this promise to the church of Pergamos the sweetest and most precious of all the seven, if not, indeed, in the whole Bible. Its tenderness, its fathomless affection, and its pledge of perpetual endearment to the blessed Son of God are unsurpassed by any words ever uttered, or that could possibly be imagined.

It was doubtless the *tessera hospitalis* which was intended by the white stone with the new and secret name. This was the farewell remembrance given to a departing guest, to be borne away by him as a memento of blessed days of hospitality and sweet interchange of soul; as a pledge of friendship which death only could ever violate; as a sacred token which could be interpreted by no other than that dearest of all friends of whose true-hearted friendship it was the pledge; as a seal binding the parties and their children and their children's children in inviolable covenant. It was the counterpart of the other portion of the white pebble cut in two to be a memento of a time of communion of soul, and retained by the host also, bearing that secret word that would serve as a passport never to be neglected or violated. Nothing could possibly be more sacred or binding than this *tessera hospitatis*. Exhibited by either party, it was recognized by the other, opened the door of hospitality, and established a confidence and interchange of friendly offices which neither time, nor change, nor adversity of any kind could ever wear away. All other bonds might be weakened, or broken, but this never. Personal interest or relationship, or pledges, or legal ties could be severed, but this was more enduring than life itself, for it went down to future generations. And not this only, but there was no token of affection it would not offer, no gift it would not present, no sacrifice it would not make, no kindness it would not extend, to the dear object with whom the priceless pledge had been interchanged.

Such was the emblem chosen by our glorified Lord through which to pledge the tenderness and endurance of his affection to his faithful followers. It is his promise of boundless and everlasting love to them. It is the same divine affection which he had of old pledged them in the memorable words: "Can a woman forsake her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me." The same inexpressible tenderness was indicated in the precious pledge: "Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, After the glory hath he sent me unto the nations which spoiled you; for he that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of his eye."

It is very easy to understand how this third promise is a great advance on the other two which went before it. The first is a pledge to the faithful that they would never die; by the second they are made certain that they would be granted a triumph over the second death; but in the third, the gracious Lord comes much nearer, and offers himself as a personal, intimate, and never-failing friend. The other promises were general, and made to all believers, in all times and places, as a class; but this is addressed to individual saints as directly and as certainly as if their names were named, and as if there were no other believers in all the world to receive them. It is not now the fruit of the tree of life, or the conquest over the horrors of death eternal, which our Lord engages to give them; but *Himself*—himself, with all his glories and riches and powers. Not only should such believers not die, or even be in danger of death eternal; but they should evermore receive a new influx of life and strength, from their ever-present heavenly Friend, which would be to them as hidden manna enriching their souls. Of this would they receive a white stone as a symbol and pledge—a stone that would bear on it a new name secret and beloved, as if constantly whispered into the soul from heaven by the living, loving Friend who would never leave them. In the other two promises are the assurance of immortality and triumph over the second death; but here is the pledge of immortal glory and joy flowing from the very heart of the celestial Friend.

*Fourth degree: Sharing with Christ in his rule over the nations.* The Bible abounds with promises to Christ that he shall have dominion over all the nations of mankind.

The promise to the church of Thyatira is that the obedience of that church would be rewarded by their "receiving power over

the nations." This blessing, implying the promised rule of the saints, holds a most conspicuous place in all the Scriptures, both Old Testament and New. Very clear and comprehensive is the divine decree as announced in the Second Psalm: "I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession."

In this, as in all similar cases, the dominion is first engaged to be given to Christ as the head and representative of the body of his people. Then, in addition to this formal decree of the Father, we have the pledge to the exalted Lord: "According to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the Church." To the same purport also is the declaration of our Lord to his disciples when leaving them as to the flesh: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." Then be it ever kept in the mind that these grants were his *as Head of the Church and of all his ransomed followers.* All was put into his hands to be held by him in trust for his redeemed people. As affirmed in Daniel: "And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him." Let it be noticed here that the people and the King are used interchangeably, the one being the representative of the other. Thus is it on earth, and so will it also be in heaven. The song of the ransomed in glory will be: "Unto him that loved us . . . . and hath made us *kings* and priests unto God and his Father." Thus it is throughout all that is made known concerning the mediatorial dominion of our Lord—the power and authority are given to him as the sovereign King.

This power over the nations is promised the saints both for time and for eternity. In the language by which the promise is given, sometimes one is intimated, sometimes the other, and sometimes both. Such is a very common feature of the prophetical language of Scripture. Frequently there are two, or

even more accomplishments intended by the same words. The first, or immediate, fulfillment is given as an intimation, a pledge of that which is more remote in the future and more glorious in itself. Eminently so is it in reference to the predicted reign of the saints. Through the inherent power and influence of the gospel they will gain an ascendency over the enemies of the kingdom at the present time, and that will become the pledge as well as the type of a grander victory over all foes in the ages that are to come. Their reign is to begin here· it is to be perfected hereafter. Now, on earth, shall the kingdom be granted to the saints of the Lord; but hereafter in the world to come will be heard their song of praise to Him who washed them in his own blood and made them kings and priests to their omnipotent Lord.

The thought that our glorified Lord, the supreme King of his ransomed Church, will share his dominion with his redeemed people is one of inexpressible glory. In some way, as yet unrevealed to us, he will associate his blood-bought servants with himself in his dominion over the nations. In this respect they are represented as his brilliant army, who follow him on to victory and rule; and this is their appearance as described in the Apocalypse: "And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood; and his name is called *The Word of God.* And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he might smite the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the wine-press of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written: "*King of kings, and Lord of lords.*" And not in victory alone, but in ruling also, would they be associated with him, according to his engagement with his disciples: "And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit on the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Just as the Father had shared the supreme throne with him, the Son, so also would he share his throne with his followers. It would seem almost as if the very vocabulary of promise and hope were exhausted in order to find expressions sufficiently strong for this glorious prospect before the redeemed of the Lord. Take this example: "Let the saints be joyful in glory; let them sing aloud upon their beds. Let the high

praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand; to execute vengeance upon the heathen, and punishments upon the people; to binds their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron; to execute upon them the judgment written: this honour have all his saints."

Mortal tongue cannot utter, nor can mortal mind conceive the exalted prospect of glory which is implied in this promise of dominion over the nations. It would seem as if it had exhausted the whole treasury of words by which such blessedness could be described. There is one most sublime engagement which contains all; and with that to plead we need have no fear of exaggerating. To make it the more impressive, it is introduced by a special assurance that it comes from the divine Spirit of all truth and holiness. Its well-known words are: "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ: if so be that we suffer with him, *that we may be also glorified together.*" *Joint-heirs with the Son of God!*—who can imagine the unspeakable glory? *Joint-heirs with him of his mediatorial dominion*, secured for him and for us by the merit of his death, and for which he was crowned as his pre-eminent glory. In this way, both omnipotence and infinite wisdom were exerted in preparing the mediatorial crown for the brow of our ever-blessed Immanuel. "I go to prepare a place for you," was the consolatory valedictory to the disciples from their departing Lord—and little did they know of the infinite depths of glorious promise which his words implied.

This dominion over the nations which is hereafter to be given to the saints is a sublime though, as yet, a mysterious promise. Early in their ministry, our Lord gave it to his disciples for their encouragement under the great sacrifices which they would be called upon to make for his cause which they had espoused. That original engagement, standing alone at the time, is exceedingly impressive. In addition to that part of it already cited, "Ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel," there follows: "And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life." They were appointed to be *witnesses* for him while they would be on earth, but thereafter, when they should have entered the portals of glory, by a marvelous transformation they would become *judges*. All through the days

of their ministry on earth this promise might well ring in their ears. Never would they be called to bear a cross, never to make a sacrifice, but this promised dominion over all their enemies might well cheer and encourage them.

The full meaning of the promise is of course as yet unknown to us; but its general intent it is not difficult to comprehend. When, as supreme Judge of the quick and the dead, the Lord of glory shall be seated upon his judgment throne, his disciples, as his most exalted officers of state, shall surround him to concur in his decisions and to ratify his words of doom. Long before that illustrious day of the final Judgment, the saints, as one with their Lord, and identified with him in all his mediatorial work, shall judge the world; as they will also be one with him in subduing and ruling over a rebellious world. He would conquer, and they with him. He would overcome the nations and govern them by a rod of iron; and here is the promise given that his faithful followers should be associated with him in that glorious achievement.

What a blessed announcement must this have been to the faithful Christians of Thyatira to whom it was first made! They were opposed and persecuted to the death by the remorseless enemies of Christ and his Church; but here is the pledge of their omnipotent Lord that he would stand by them, and their enemies should yet be broken and scattered as if by a rod of iron. Through his infinite power they would be enabled to dash in pieces every foe to that truth and righteousness which they had been ordained to proclaim and uphold.

From all this it is easy to see that this promise of power over the nations is a degree of exaltation higher than the one which went before it; and so, of course, higher than all the previous ones. When we survey the successive stages of the progress, we become lost in wonder. Assurance of certain immortality; of perfect safety from even any danger from the second death; of the dearest, tenderest and most inviolable friendship with the supreme Lord; and now, of a share with him in his dominion over the nations of the world;—is there anything that can rise higher than these? Yes; a higher glory still is promised to those who shall remain brave and faithful amid an atmosphere of hypocrisy!

*Fifth degree: Special trophies of His mediatorial achievement.* This is that higher degree of glory pledged to those who prove faithful and true in the midst of the spiritual blight and hypocrisy

prevailing in the church of Sardis. Its prospect of unspeakable glory is opened in the blessed words: "He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment, and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels." This promise surpasses all that was ever seen on earth by mortal eyes, or conceived of by mortal mind.

We behold the august assembly gathered around the throne on which is seated the exalted Son of man, who has come "in his glory, and all the holy angels with him." There, too, are collected the most pure and noble of all creatures, angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim, principalities and powers—all the most exalted of celestial beings, as well as the most renowned of the ransomed saints from every land of earth, and every age of time. All are there. The universe has never witnessed such an assemblage. It is the Day of days. The day of the espousals of our glorified Mediator has come. The "exceeding greatness of his power" and of his majesty is now to be manifested. Having subdued sin, and Satan, and hell, and death, and the grave, he had ascended up on high, leading captivity captive, and been placed at the right hand of the supreme Majesty "in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; and God hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the Church."

In the midst of that glorious assembly, according to this special promise, the faithful follower of his Lord upon earth is now to be presented, as an honored trophy of Christ's sublimest achievement upon earth. Long ago had his name been written in ineffaceable characters on the pages of the Lamb's book of life. And now, on the great Day of the Lord, it is sought for and found, and the blessed saint is to be glorified before the assembled universe. He is arrayed in white robes for presentation amid the holy ones gathered around the Great White Throne. In the days of temptation on earth, and amid the defilements of an atmosphere of corruption, he had not soiled the garments with which his Lord had adorned him. This was not forgotten, but he is now arrayed in the pure robes of the heavenly sanctuary into which he is to be admitted.

Then is he brought into that Presence where the angels bow, and the archangels veil their faces: but *he does not fall down in shame, crushed and abashed;*—for he is led by the hand of that

adorable Lord whom he had been enabled to confess when all others had denied him upon earth. He is introduced by Him whose majesty is there supreme. By that adorable one, the highest and holiest of all, the King of kings and Lord of lords, he is presented as a trophy of the grandest victory of time. The Victor leads him forward in rapture, and, naming his name in that congregation where every other voice is hushed, and every soul is filled with reverence, his heavenly Lord proclaims: "Here is one of the ransomed for whom I shed my blood on the cross; one whom I have rescued from death and hell, one who was faithful and true to me when all else had denied me, one who, having cleansed his robes in my blood, has come up out of great tribulation, and is now to take his place amid the holy and the glorious ones by my most honored throne."

Oh the rapture of the saint at that supreme moment of glory and bliss! Oh the thrill of joy unspeakable that will take possession of his whole being! Oh the ecstatic greeting from the heavenly hosts that will welcome him to their holy, blissful, and unending companionship!

Scarce a word need be added to prove that this is a degree of blessedness far in advance of all that had gone before it. *Glory* is the one word which gives its character to all. Glory in the sublime event—glory in the celestial companionship, glory that cannot be described or imagined, in Him who is the centre, the source, and the sum of all. There is glory unspeakable in each degree of the promises which have gone before, but in none of them is that glory so ineffable as in this.

*Sixth degree: Ornaments and supports of the celestial Kingdom.* "I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out." The pillar of a temple is its most distinctive and most honored object. All the peculiarity, distinction, beauty, and glory of a temple are concentrated in its columns. On these the special skill and most earnest study of the architect are put forth. The style of these was what gave name and character to the splendid structures of old. Corinthian, Doric, Ionic, Composite, and others were the names by which the most celebrated temples were known; and these were in their pillars. Epochs in architecture were designated by the prevalence of one or other of these forms. Then, considering that in any given temple there were ordinarily only a few, perhaps but five or six, of these, we can readily understand why they should be such celebrated objects in the sacred structure.

Most celebrated they sometimes were. Its pillars in any temple were that which gave it name and character, and which often drew admirers to the renowned building from distant regions of the world. Such was it with the pillars of the beautiful colonnade which made the Parthenon of Athens the wonder and admiration of mankind. So was it also with the columns of Diana's temple in Ephesus, each of which was the gift of some king in Asia and which were considered of such priceless value that, when the building fell into ruins, some of them were transported for hundreds of miles, and guarded with such sacred care that even to this day they are among the most valued ornaments of such buildings as St. Sophia in Constantinople and St. Mark's in Venice. Such, too, was it with that solitary surviving pillar which now towers over the ruins of Sardis, the masterpiece of Doric architecture. Because of their beauty, their perfection, and their fame, these were the ornaments which our Lord chose by which to describe the honor that he would bestow upon his faithful servants of Philadelphia.

Nor is this all. The pillars were objects most admired in temples because of their beauty, and their power of awakening thought; but they were also most important in that they were the supports of the structure. Who can describe the dignity of the believer in being thus honored by comparison with an emblem so esteemed in the sight of God? Take one of the old cathedrals of England, and gaze upon its venerable columns that support its splendid ceilings, and then consider that such is the symbol chosen to describe the glory awaiting those holy men who have been the stay of the Church. An unspeakable honor would this be in any case; but how much more so in Philadelphia, when every other structure has been shattered by the convulsions of earthquakes, and only one old pillar remains as a trophy which even time itself could not destroy. The upheavals of nineteen centuries have shaken it, and yet it stands unmoved. So is it, and so will it for ever be with the faithful servant of the Lord. The promise is here made him that he shall be raised to the unspeakable dignity of being evermore an honored support of the celestial temple. Like that immovable pillar amid the ruins of Philadelphia, he shall abide through ages—shall stand unmoved and immovable! A support in the Church above, appointed and upheld by the arm of Omnipotence: what peerless glory! As if alone and most honored of all, he is to abide for ever in dignity and glory. He "shall go no more out" from

the temple of his God. What matchless bliss and honor these words imply, even though they are conveyed in terms of mystery, the depths of which we cannot fathom!

We need scarcely indicate that this is a vast increase over all that goes before in the glory which is promised to all the faithful followers of the Lord. In these peculiar words there is at once a promise and an emblem of the richest reward that is in store for the honored servants of their King. We cannot but be impressed with the higher dignity that is indicated by a pillar towering above all other splendid objects. Its position, its eminence above other things, its history, its sacredness, its symbolical character, and its own peerless beauty,—all conspire in making it an object whose antitype must be most exalted even amid these marvelous promises. The glory which God has in store for the faithful of his followers is that which it is intended to describe, and assuredly nothing else which we have thus far considered can compare with it.

Add to all this the distinction guaranteed to it of bearing aloft the glorious names of the supreme God, and the name of God's heavenly city, the new name of the mediatorial King himself—a name that is above every name that thought ever conceived or tongue ever uttered. And now it would seem that the highest imaginable point had been reached of which promise could be given or hope excited. If the engagement has been entered into that the saint shall be immortal, that he shall be placed beyond the reach of harm from the second death, that he shall be made the most intimate and honored friend of the Son of God, that he shall be associated with the Lord Jesus in ruling over all the nations of the world, that he shall be openly presented before the assembled universe as a trophy of our Lord's greatest victory over sin and Satan and death, and, as if the very masterpiece of divine skill, he would be most honored in the heavenly temple—then surely, after all this, nothing higher could be promised, or even conceived of. And yet, a higher degree of promise still remains. It is the very highest of all—and even it is not kept back from our astonished view, as the very summit of the glory in which the ransomed will hereafter be allowed to share.

*Seventh degree: A seat, with the Father and the Son, in the throne of supreme glory.* The very thought of this—much more the naming of the words—seems an aspiration far too daring for mortals of our sinful race! "To him that overcometh will I grant

to sit with me in my throne even as I also overcame and am sat down with my Father in his throne."

This is the promise of our glorified Redeemer given from the seat of supreme glory to which he had ascended, after he had passed through the scenes of Gethsemane and Calvary. The words are true and plain and never-failing. They are the more emphatic in that they were among the first words our exalted Lord uttered as he ascended into his mediatorial dominion. They are the more impressive still as being the climax of this marvelous catalogue of promises which we have followed up as we have found them on the sacred pages. We have here the crowning triumph, beyond which there can be nothing further of dignity or of blessing, for the summit has been reached, the very presence of Him who sits upon the throne, not only within reach of him at all times, but as it were leaning on his breast: "To him that overcometh will I give to sit with me in my throne." When we have reached the throne here, we have reached that point towards which everything else has tended from the beginning, and in which all else that can be desired culminates. All power, majesty, authority and glory are concentrated in the throne. Every sublime effort that is made, and all the plans of infinite wisdom that are ever devised are fixed around the throne. Every trophy of divine majesty that is gathered from all worlds and all ages is brought in triumph and laid down at the throne. All creatures of noblest form, most sublime powers, and most transcendent glory, in ecstasy of adoration gather around the throne. Every crown of principalities and powers in heavenly places is brought from regions of space the most distant, and from scenes of life the most active, and are cast down before the heavenly throne. There the light of celestial glory is never dimmed, and the strains of the heavenly song are never hushed.

Who shall fully interpret for us the marvelous revealings concerning that great white throne from the opening sights and sounds of that glorious Apocalypse by which the supreme Lord first proclaims his coronation over all worlds and potentates of heaven and earth? Only He who raised that throne and is himself seated thereon can impart to creatures any adequate conception of its indescribable magnificence. And this he does, amid scenes the most sublime that ear ever heard, or eye ever beheld. He opens a door for us into the heavenly world, and, as with a trumpet sound, he summons us up to gaze within and behold that throne with all its celestial wonders. We look, and our eyes rest, now

upon that great white throne; now upon the celestial Majesty seated thereon, dazzling as the light; and now upon the divine glory, bright as the diamond and soft as the carnelian; now upon a rainbow, splendid in its usual coloring, but distinguished by the prevalence of its emerald hues,—a rainbow that surrounds all with hope and promise; now upon seven brilliant lamps evermore blazing before the throne; now upon a sea of glass clear as crystal, on whose ripples are sparkling the rays of the divine glory; now upon four-and-twenty crowned elders on their radiant seats, in robes of snowy whiteness,—the appointed emblem of the ransomed Church, with its twelve renowned patriarchs and twelve apostles; and now upon the glorious "living beings," the brilliant cherubim, with their faces of a man, an ox, a lion, and an eagle, symbolic of their intelligence, their strength, their courage, and their rapidity as messengers of the Deity. And now, as they spread their wings, full of eyes, is heard the rapturous acclaim which ceases neither day nor night: "Holy holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come!" And now the crowned elders arise from their radiant seats, and casting down their crowns before the Majesty on the central throne, exclaim, in sounds that fill all heaven: "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are, and were created."

Such is the Throne of God described by the pen of inspiration. It is the mediatorial throne which was given to the glorified Son of man as his reward, and on which he took his seat of supreme dominion after he had finished the work of human redemption. It is the throne concerning which this promise, which is the climax of all the seven, and concerning which the words are written: "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with my Father in his throne."

There is one aspect of the revealed descriptions of the mediatorial throne which is well worthy of our most profound consideration. It is the oft-repeated fact that the glory of that throne is so alluring, even in the sight of the incarnate Son of God, that it stimulated and sustained him in the moments of his sorest sufferings and deepest woes: "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." That joy ineffable he beheld as awaiting him at the close of his toils and agonies,

and as the reward of all he was enduring, and on it his intense desire was fixed, so that he was borne up by it even in ascending by the cross towards the crown.

Then, if it were thus with Him who was God as well as man, how may it be with us whose infirmities require such incentives to carry us forward through the great tribulations of our earthly struggles! In our darkest and most discouraging trials it is our privilege to raise our eyes up to the grand future and fix them on the great white throne. Our very tribulations may thereby become most glorious experiences. We can think of the heavenly reward, and be strengthened by the thought, and yet be neither selfish nor extravagant in our motives. If the thought of the glorious throne was a motive that bore up the human nature of our Lord, what may it not be to us? Oh the thought of that throne!—our sorrows all ended, our sufferings all over, and then the infinite and endless reward of standing hard by that centre of infinite majesty and bliss!

The very idea and word, *throne*, carry with them the thought of supreme and boundless empire. The throne in this promise brings before us the scene of all creatures on earth and in heaven bowing at the command of Omnipotence and yielding unquestioning obedience before Jehovah. Believers on earth and saints and angels in heaven all hearken and hasten as glorious messengers to carry the commands of the Most High. Subjects of that empire, they wing their flight over every region of the boundless creation of which their Lord is the King. This is the recompense which was promised and granted our Redeemer when, "for the joy set before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame," and the proclamation sounded: "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

We must also contemplate the throne as the centre of all glory, as well as of all empire and power. Most sublimely is this proclaimed in the Epistle to the church of Ephesus: "The exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is

named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church."

The language of this final promise not only justifies us in so doing, but even demands that we should elevate our thoughts and fix them upon the glories which surround the sublime dwelling-place of the Most High, where angels adore and the seraphim sound forth the praises of the infinite Jehovah. By this marvelous series of promises we have been led forward and upward, step by step, until the summit of all glory and majesty has been reached at the supreme throne. The Throne!—it is the crown and centre of victory over every enemy of earth and hell; of power to which there is no limit or end; of authority to the behests of which every creature must reverently bow; and of glory the brightness of which it is not in the power of the highest imagination to conceive!

Such is the throne of God, the Most High, upwards towards which we have been conducted, degree after degree, by the teachings of the Holy Spirit. In the sublime intercourse of the Deity, through some mysterious arrangement into which it is not given for creature to penetrate, and of which we are permitted to know only through the most wonderful engagement that our Lord will hereafter share his very throne with the heirs of salvation—an engagement which is made still more marvelous by the assertion that the elevation of the victorious saint to the heavenly throne would be like his own elevation, as conquerer over all, to the mediatorial throne of supreme glory. At every step here there is divine mystery, the depths of which we shall in this world never be able to penetrate, and the exploring of which will be one of the greatest raptures of eternity.

Our bliss and our glory now are that in this, the final one, we have the most exalted promise that could be given. Beyond this there is not another that could be named. It verily appears to be too great to be believed, or even comprehended! This is the glorious destiny that is awaiting every brave follower of the Lord who shall prove faithful in the conflict with sin and Satan to which all believers are called: "To sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with my Father in his throne!" Sharers in Christ's own peculiar mediatorial throne —the highest seat of divine glory and power! A blood-washed saint, coming up out of an atmosphere of corruption, and contest, and wretchedness, and welcomed to a place amid the

central glory! We cannot fathom the mystery, nor can any creature. We can but receive it as coming from the lips of Him who is the *Truth*, and there rest, wondering and adoring. It is not a dream; it is not a mere indefinite hope; it is a marvelous fact, yet to be experienced by every ransomed and conquering soul, and made sure by this inviolable engagement of the Son of man.

We are now prepared to take a full review of the whole field of goodness and wisdom which is covered by the manner in which these gracious promises are announced to the faithful followers of our Lord. In themselves they are separately and unitedly of wondrous glory; but the form in which they are presented is calculated to bring them home to us in still more marvelous force. The most cursory review makes it evident that they were not merely thrown together amidst a blaze of glory; but that there was a loving design in so arranging them that they would make the deepest possible impression upon the minds of those to whom they were pledged. That there is a gracious plan in the manner of presenting them, and that plan the devising of divine love and wisdom, becomes more and more certain the more they are considered. At first view it is caught in dim outline, but every additional aspect brings out the lines more distinctly, and reveals its exact filling up in more wondrous beauty.

The principles of that divine arrangement cannot but first impress us. We become confident that it could not have been a mere accident that in these engagements to the faithful there should have been two distinct promises to each church; that all the promises should be diverse from each other; that in them we should find, all through, germs of glorious fruition that are developed throughout the body of the Apocalypse; that each one of them should be revealed by means of some emblem found in the locality of the church; that they should all be presented in the form of rewards; that the peculiar nature of the promises should be determined by the character of the church to which they were each addressed, and that there should be such a surprising progress in the degrees of blessedness engaged—from the lowest degree, step by step, up to the highest that is possible or even conceivable. This could not simply have so happened; it must have been the planning of the infinitely wise and benevolent mind of our loving Lord!

And still more interesting grows the review as we trace the upward stages of the degrees of the heavenly progress. As, by the peculiarity of the divine pledges, we are undoubtedly war-

ranted in doing, personifying the upward progress of the conquering saint, we see him assured of a blessed immortality; he is made sure of immunity from all hurt by the second death; he is received into the intimate confidence and friendship of the Lord of glory; he is associated with the triumphant Messiah in the government of the nations of the world; he has opened to him the rapturous prospect of an honored presentation in the glorious assembly of all the celestials; through the everlasting ages he is to be honored as one of the highest ornaments and supports of heaven's temple; he is to be admitted to a seat in the very midst of the throne of the supreme Deity. Beyond this, neither can heart desire nor mind conceive.

Evidently all this is intended to win our hearts, and to fill our souls with adoring gratitude; for nothing is left undone which could have any effect in exciting our hope, establishing our confidence, or exacting our supreme gratitude and love. The beauty of this plan in which the promises are presented cannot but fill the beholder with wonder and delight. The impression it is calculated to make must be very deep.

### THE "MORNING STAR" AS THE FINAL EMBLEM OF HOPE AND PROMISE.

It might be imagined here that all of promise, of hope and of encouragement that could be conceived of had been already presented for the comfort and stimulation of the tempted children of God—that the climax of the promises was reached, when a seat was pledged to the faithful in the very throne of the Deity; but another view is opened up, which reveals the prospect of the saints as without limit, and without the possibility of a limit, however far its investigation may be extended. One single emblem opens up that most entrancing view—an emblem which our glorified Lord claims as peculiarly his own when he asserts: "*I am the bright and Morning Star.*" What does the expression import? Evidently, it does not simply mean a brilliant point of light amid a world of darkness. That thought would be more forcibly expressed by sun or moon. It means not merely an ordinary star, however brilliant, but it is splendidly described as "the bright and morning star." As to Christ, of whom it is the intended symbol, it is not the simple harbinger of his near approach—that is done directly by the promise, "I come quickly." Not these merely, or anything like them, can be signified by "the bright and morning star," as used here; but it is the emblem of brightness as suc-

ceeding darkness; of freshness, reviving, novelty, reanimation, progress, hope of a clear day as yet to come. Of all these Christ, in himself, is the glorious image. All these are elements of the morning star when used as an emblem of our Lord. He is the embodiment of them in a glorious figure. In the enjoyment of all that heart could desire, whether on earth or in heaven, we would be prone to become satiated by the long-continued and oft-repeated pleasure; but against this he is the Heaven-ordained antidote. He, as the very essence and emblem of reviving, freshness, newness and hope, for ever imparts a zest that neither repetition nor length of use can cloy.

Such is the emblem itself in its own significance. But this is not all, as it stands here in the Apocalypse. Its peculiar location is calculated to impart to it a special meaning. It is placed at the very close of the inspired volume, and that not as arising out of the immediate connection, but as a closing declaration, as a seal or stamp to be placed on every element of the sacred Book which had come from God. It is the one expression which was intended to impart a peculiarity to every part which had gone before. This view of the closing emblem becomes peculiarly significant when it is carefully considered. There must be special meaning in it that Christ as "the bright and morning star" is the closing thought of the whole Bible. In the last chapter of the New Testament, and the sixteenth verse, we find this expression, "I am the bright and morning star," and close examination discovers that it is the very end of the sacred volume. A few brief sentences follow it, but it is easily seen that they do not belong to the substance of the revelation; they are only a concluding guard affixed to the Apocalypse closed by this emblem —inviting to the blessings promised in the volume, warning against either adding to or taking from the sacred Book, affirming the nearness of our Lord's second coming, and pronouncing the divine benediction upon all. The deeply significant thing is that this proclamation of Christ and by Christ as "the bright and morning star" is the close proper of the glorious Revelation.

Can we help believing that this peculiar characteristic of Christ is given this prominent place at the close to intimate that it is the character of the whole revealed Word in the Scriptures? The essential thought of the morning star is to be the essential spirit of the Bible, and all pertaining thereto. The morning star, with its freshness, and promise, and newness, and hope, as a glorious light is raised up so high as to send backward its brightness over

all the past revealings, and forward to give light and hope over all that was to come. Standing just where it does, at the close of the inspired volume, the grand significance of this emblem of Christ cannot be mistaken. The closing assurance it gives is that he will evermore be with its inspired words, to keep them fresh, and clear, and new, and always applicable to the devout reader. The histories will be preserved as vivid as if they were the occurrences of the present day. The laws will never become obsolete, but continue from age to age as plain and binding as if the finger of God were seen inscribing them. The sacred songs will never lose their charm, but evermore enrapture the soul as sweetly as when at first wafted on the breezes of the Judean hills. The sublime predictions of ages long past shall never wax old, and never lose their soul-stirring appeals. The divine utterances of our Lord, the marvelous works of his hands, and the gracious influences that went out from his presence, can never lose that halo of glory which surrounds his memory. The mysteries of redemption, the doctrines of godliness, and the astounding truths which made the proudest and wisest of men to tremble, are just as marvelous to-day as when they were first uttered, and will still continue so throughout all the ages of both time and eternity. Not only will all these sublimities of salvation never lose their impressiveness, but beyond them and above them will there evermore rise up new wonders in the divine plan of redemption. For ever has our glorious Lord himself been, and evermore will he be, the "*bright and Morning Star*"—the light, and the hope, and the promise of all that is revealed in the sacred pages, and of all that is yet to be developed in the counsels of the Deity!

It is a great marvel and an unspeakable bliss to us that in the study of the Bible we are at all times sure of having with us the presence of our Lord as the bright and morning star. That sacred volume comes to us from him, and his presence gives it freshness, and zest, and an animating hope of brighter and better things as still coming. The grand announcement, "I am the bright and morning star," standing as it does—the closing word—gives assurance that he is to accompany every sentence that has gone before. By his cheering and vivifying Spirit he is to be with every history, and counsel, and song of praise; every prayer, prediction and promise growing brighter and brighter. He, with his animating Spirit, and joyous light, will cover the utterances, and send forward a hope that will be unspeakable and full of glory.

From this it comes to pass in the experience of believers that no earnest student of the divine word ever opens its pages but he finds something new, something as fresh as the morning star, something that fills his soul with bright anticipations of richer joys that are yet coming. Its songs of praise never grow stale, or fail to awaken raptures as yet unimagined. The Bible tells us much, but it hints at far more than tongue can utter or even imagination anticipate. It evermore reiterates the old story of redeeming love, and its final strains are of the "new song," the sweetness of which awakens the raptures of celestial and immortal blessedness. Its source and its soul is the great Teacher who has come from God, and his very name and nature is the Morning Star, soaring above all else with a freshness of glory which is beheld in every region, and which tinges every event of history, and every point of time in the coming ages.

That our Lord, by his abiding presence, will evermore give zest and promise to the blessings of his gospel is the unspeakably precious assurance of this emblem which closes the heavenly revelation, and irradiates every promise and prospect that is held out to the saints of the Lord both for time and eternity. We cannot make this blessed truth too emphatic. It cannot be reiterated too frequently. So it is, and so it will ever be in all Christian experience; in the language of the Eastern queen: "I believed not the words, until I came and mine eyes had seen it; and, behold, the half was not told me!" The fullness of the bliss which God hath prepared for his faithful people hath never been told, and never can be. The richness of its promises can never be understood excepting through experience.

We have followed up the gracious promises, stage after stage, until we have reached a climax whence neither language, nor thought can go farther. Must we then cease? Is that the end? Is it not rather as if there stretched an abyss beyond, the immeasurable leagues of which cherubic wing had never ranged, and created mind had never imagined? On the brink of that abyss of glory, even specific promises must leave the saint, while conducted and cheered on by Christ as "the bright and morning star," he soars onward, through regions of celestial blessedness which eternity only can reveal.

The wealth of this emblem of our Lord as the Morning Star is not exhausted when it has been applied to the believer's various wants, and trials, and aspirations on this side of the grave. No, not here, on earth, does its significance end; but it has a grander

mission, and a more sublime place in the celestial firmament—and even concerning this it contains hints and intimations to which we can but listen while bewildered with the promised glory that is to be revealed. After all that we can hear, or imagine, we must still confess, in the language given us by the Holy Ghost: "Now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be."

There is one view of this whole subject which opens up to us a theme of most ennobling contemplation. The promises to the victorious believer pass before us, one after another, stage after stage, higher and higher, until the summit is reached, and thought or language has nothing farther to offer. What then? Must the apocalypse close? No. As if the process were to be prolonged into infinitude, our Lord appears above all and far beyond all as the bright Morning Star illuminating vistas new, and grander, and boundless for evermore. Not in *time* alone is he the Morning Star, but in a still more sublime sense will he be so to the ransomed saints in the heavenly paradise. The emblem gives assurance that there cannot be any satiety in the enjoyment of the raptures of that blessed world. Its joys, though constantly repeated, age after age, will not surfeit or ever lose their zest to the happy participants. The presence with them of their glorified Lord will prevent that; for as the Morning Star, even in eternity, he will impart fresh rapture, and envelop all the future in the brightness of new hopes that will never disappoint. He will be to the saints all in all, and that with the freshness and fullness of the promised "morning star." Because of this, the heavenly joys will be for ever new. The light of its glory will never grow dim; the ecstasy of its bliss will ever be as great as in the first rapturous moments; its fields will ever be as green, its groves will ever be as vernal, and the beauty of its flowers will ever be as full of charms as when the ransomed were first permitted to behold them.

Nor is this emblem a promise merely that the zest of heavenly joys will continue in all its freshness, but it is also an intimation of endless increase in the happiness of the blessed. The morning star ever tells of a brighter day that is coming, and as Jesus is evermore the Morning Star of promise, his presence, from age to age, will be the pledge of new joys to be revealed. He will himself be the sure and steadfast hope of a perpetual increase in the coming glory. He will, with his own hand, lead his ransomed people by the banks of the river of his pleasures, ever fresh and ever increasing in volume, as they flow out from God's right hand.

From this revealed characteristic of our glorified Lord there comes to us an undoubted promise of endless increase in all the glories of the future world. Then what new avenues of knowledge will continue to open up before the saint as he comprehends more and more fully the successive perfections of Jehovah, as the marvels of providence evolve more fully in his sight, and as he soars, from star to star, from world to world, and continually finds fresh traces of his Father's infinite love and wisdom and power! Who shall fully explain to us the increasing brightness and joy that are implied in the prophetic revealing: "They rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come!"

We have now reached the close of this list of the special promises made to each of the seven churches—a list which has filled us with wonder and delight from first to last. Before writing the final word, however, we must reiterate our admiration of the unspeakable goodness and wisdom which selected this strangely expressive emblem by which to close the prospect opened before the sorely-tried followers of the Lord. We very greatly doubt whether any other form of expression could have been selected so suitable, so full of hope and promise, and so sacredly inspiriting to the militant but true-hearted Church of the passing ages. The various promises come one after another with transcendent and ever-increasing grandeur and cheer. Like a tide of glory they swell and flow on as if continually receiving new accessions from the rivers of the heavenly paradise.

The climax has been reached, the highest promise received, the most exalted prospect opened, the sum of all the divine revelations communicated. What then? is the next anxious question which presses for answer. And the response which spontaneously arises in every devout mind is that, amid these glorious mysteries accompanying the dawn of eternal blessedness, the next and the all-absorbing object must be the ascended Lord, in all his infinite majesty then entering upon the reward the prospect of which sustained him even amid the agonies of the cross. Nothing but the glorified Jesus will do for these majestic scenes—Jesus the All in all, Jesus the Beginning and the End; Jesus the Alpha and the Omega. On Jesus alone must we throw ourselves; but in what majestic aspect shall he be seen, as the sacred volume closes, the celestial revealings end, the promises reach their climax, and we launch away into the unknown glories of eternity?

He alone—because he alone can—gives us the answer. His

answer comes in the form of this one sublime symbol, which closes the divine volume, and casts its light forward and upward through the infinite heights of the endless ages: "*I am the Bright and Morning Star.*" Who can imagine anything more significant, more sublime, or more rich in information concerning God's revealed purposes as to his kingdom—but especially concerning those everlasting counsels the developments of which are to come after the Bible closes, the promises are completed, and the saints have entered upon the enjoyment of the glory prepared for them from the foundation of the world—than is this marvelous emblem?

It is the one expression which, forming the immortal symbol emerging from the dark abyss of the future, becomes the pledge of the blessedness of all the ransomed, when they shall be permitted to share with the Son of God in his mediatorial throne. As far as thought can conceive or words express it, is to be the glory which God has prepared for those who love him. When the successive promises of the messages had ascended up to the utmost limit, this is a divine intimation of both the fact and the manner in which it is to be continued for evermore. It describes our glorified Lord, as he will be to the redeemed in the eternal world, through an emblem which, from its very nature, can have no limits. Marvelously expressive, it represents him as being to them an earnest of an ever-increasing glory as the endless ages roll. No other words of which we can conceive would express such an embodiment and pledge of growing brightness and freshness and hope. It intimates that, not for one brief blessed period merely, but throughout the everlasting ages, will he be the same "*Bright and Morning Star.*" Most sublimely does it tell of a brilliant light kindled at the heavenly throne, and flashing afar forward and upward over the infinite abyss of endless ages and boundless space. Hence this magnificent climax of the sublime promises and celestial revelation is the glorified Son of man himself, in his unspeakable brightness, eternal vigor, everlasting freshness, and inextinguishable hopes. Could it be otherwise? Would any other close be proportionate to the marvelous chain of promises, where language fails and created imagination can go no farther?

# CHAPTER XXII.

## MORTAL ATTENTION SUMMONED; OR, CHARGE TO GIVE EARNEST HEED.

### NATURE OF THE CHARGE.

Our gracious Lord having, in the messages, covered the whole field of instruction, advice, admonition, menace, and promise, closes all by the old formula of appeal so often found in arousing attention to solemn and momentous things: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." Wherever, throughout the sacred pages, this obligation is imposed, it is designed to awaken attention to matters of extraordinary importance. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." "There is nothing hid that shall not be manifested." "And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." All these are associated with the solemn charge: "He that hath an ear, let him hear." In many other scriptural connections is this significant injunction to be found; but nowhere in such a striking form as here. It closes and as it were seals each of the seven messages. As directly as if it stood alone, may the finger of our enthroned Lord be seen pointing to each separate message, and pressing it upon the closest attention of every reader.

This great earnestness on the part of the celestial King in arousing the attention of the churches is one of the marvels of these marvelous communications. Only when we closely analyze the subject point after point, as it is presented in the body of the messages, and so discover the evident purpose of our Lord to make the deepest impression upon his churches, do we realize the greatness of the stress laid upon this charge.

In attempting to study it, we shall find it lying on the very surface that, *in the sight of God*, the charge is one of the deepest moment. His heart was manifestly set upon it. He makes use

of the most earnest effort to arouse attention to these solemn warnings and counsels and promises, and all other interests of the kingdom. He knows, as mere creatures could not know, the superlative value of these things; and here we have, laid open to us, his mind concerning them.

In this last element of all the messages to the seven churches we see how strong is the purpose to arouse their members to a more than ordinary attention to these special communications from the heavenly throne. A very special obligation is laid on them to give earnest heed to his words of warning and promise.

(1) *Our Lord's opinion of it* is the first and most satisfactory way through which we can arrive at an adequate estimate of this momentous charge to his people. His mind concerning this or any other communication to us is of prime importance, inasmuch as his knowledge is perfect, and his concern for his Church is boundless. To know what his mind is should ever be with us the first effort. On this particular point he has left us without question or doubt. The earnestness of his utterances, the various ways in which they are expressed, and his manifest solicitude to awaken the attention of his people, show plainly the great importance which he attaches to this closing charge. Without a shadow of doubt, our glorified Lord and King summons, in the most impressive terms, every soul to give good heed to this solemn admonition with which the messages are closed.

(2) The second reflection which shows the transcendent moment of these closing words of the messages is the high estimation in which they have always been held by the greatest and best of God's true children. The universal experience of the most sincerely pious and most intelligent of believers is the best interpretation of the mind of our Lord. What their faith has made them is the testimony of the Church as to the meaning of the Word delivered to the saints. Two or three instances drawn from different ages and circumstances may serve to illustrate as well as prove the principle. The Rev. Archibald Alexander, D. D., was wont to say to his classes, as we often heard him: "*I consider it as a peculiar duty and privilege to read the first three chapters of the Apocalypse, seeing that they are preceded by the assurance, 'Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.'*" Sir Isaac Newton once wrote: "I do not find any words in any other part of the New Testament so strangely introduced and commended as those of the charge: 'He that hath an ear, let

him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.'" Bengel, in his riper years, frequently admonished his children diligently to study these epistles to the churches, asserting: "Scarce anything is so fitted to affect and purify us. . . . . Whoever wishes to hear the Apocalypse properly ought to observe the admonitions of these seven epistles." One of his children wrote concerning him: "I remember that, just at the last hours of his pilgrimage, my sainted parent earnestly commended to his family the frequent reading and study of the epistles in the Apocalypse; adding as the reason: '*There is scarce anything that can press to the depths of one's nature with such purifying power.*'"

(3) A third evidence of the emphasis laid upon this charge to the churches is seen in the peculiar structure, language, impressive words, and special form in which it is presented in each instance. Stronger language could not be used; the structure of the expression could not be more striking. Not a word that is superfluous; not a syllable but must tell. The whole structure has the same manifest intent of arousing the entire being to hear and heed the call to make the things of the soul, of God, and eternity the first business of life. This call had been reiterated in many a form all through the current of the sacred volume; it had become more and more urgent as the pages were revealed; but now, as the end approaches, its importunity grows to be almost boundless.

(4) A fourth peculiarity which manifests the earnestness of the Spirit's call is the very remarkable fact that in the epistles taken as one body this charge is repeated no less than seven times, and that in the very same words. It is made to close, and, as it were, seal the obligation imposed upon each separate church.

(5) The very structure of the epistles seems intended for the same purpose. The peculiar manner in which the communication from the divine throne is imparted; the strangely systematic form in which the various items are introduced; the novelty of the plan on which the messages are arranged; the unexpected and strangely attractive character of the metaphors that are used; and the utter dissimilarity from any other method of making known to men the mind of the heavenly King,—all these peculiarities cannot fail of leaving the impression that the purpose was to awaken unusual attention to a special communication which the Church ought to know, carefully ponder, and apply to its faith and life. This great purpose of the epistles' peculiarity of form cannot be mistaken. Who can peruse these com-

munications coming down directly from the celestial throne—now describing the marvelous attributes of the glorified King in his mediatorial dominion; now commending what was faithful and loyal in his followers; now rebuking the shortcomings in any of the churches; now giving warning of what would be the dreadful consequences of all transgressions even in those who bore his holy name; and now promising to all who would continue faithful that they should receive rewards of glory and honor and immortality—in all using symbols of wondrous beauty, and all arranged according to a scheme more impressive than was ever planned by created mind;—who can study all this without coming to the assured conviction that it was intended to produce an attention that would be deep and abiding?

(6) It is a significant and solemn thought that this appeal for earnest attention is made by the Holy Ghost. He appeals to all the churches in infinite love, and care, and wisdom, and authority. Let it be distinctly noticed that at each one of the seven repetitions of the charge, "He that hath an ear, let him hear," it is announced that the Spirit is the speaker—"what the Spirit saith unto the churches." Nor can we pass over the thought either of the overwhelming moment of the communication from the stress laid, or of the messenger. Now it is Jesus Christ who delivers it; now it is an angel from the throne; now it is the beloved disciple, who once lay upon his Lord's breast; and seven times over it is the Holy Spirit. It passed through each of these in coming down to make its impress upon the churches of all time. So supremely important was it, that man, angel, and Deity were all concerned in securing for it the deep attention that it deserved. And what a charge it must have been that bore the stamp of such authority! Surely no words would have come with such emphasis from the Holy Spirit, were it not to convey a message of infinite moment! How earnestly he appeals to his people through the great Teacher, and by a charge so wise and true! As the "Spirit of Wisdom," he knows how to reach the earnest soul; "of Understanding," the kind of appeals that will be effectual; "of Counsel," the plans and the motives that will best succeed; "of Might," the power that may not be resisted; "of Knowledge," the things that are most needed; and "of the Fear of the Lord," all that is high, and sacred, and divinely wise. It is this very Spirit of "wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord," that makes such earnest

appeal to each of the seven churches. Who can resist such love, turn away in indifference from such divine entreaty, and risk the danger of neglecting such compassionate and holy tenderness?

(7) The final consideration is that the charge was sent down from the throne of our Lord. It is worthy of most earnest consideration that this admonition came down to us from the heart of our triumphant Lord just as he was taking his seat upon his mediatorial throne. It was a behest to us from the dwelling-place of divine and everlasting Love. It was heralded to the Church of all time from amidst the throng of blood-washed saints and unfallen angels. From the ranks of the glorified, who, day and night, unite in the ceaseless song: "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever: amen," was sent down to the militant church on earth, the earnest call: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." From the celestial walls were witnessed the trials, and toils, and poverty, and sufferings of the faithful as they still struggled on with sin; and then were they cheered on by the earnest summons from the celestial throne. How thrilling that charge as descending from the Lord of glory to every region of earth and every age of time!

When this significant appeal which closes each one of the seven messages is considered in the light of all the accompanying circumstances, we must see how infinitely important it is, as was also the obligation which it was intended to impress. Not one item in them was superfluous. Not one of these reasons is exaggerated. It would not be possible to exaggerate the importance of the Church as such, or of its individual members, giving heed to this closing charge. We see it deeply impressed by our Lord's urgency concerning it; by the high estimation in which it has ever been held by the holiest and wisest of men; by the marvelously strong language used in expressing it; by its significant repetition seven times over; by the strangely systematic manner in which it is pressed home on every hearer; by the precious fact that it is urged in the words of the Holy Ghost; and by the fact that it was sent down to each of the churches from the very throne of the Deity. Every one of these considerations might well secure for this charge the most profound attention from those for whom it was intended; but when they are all put together, who can conceive of the weight of the motive for giving heed thereto which they form? It has been most truthfully said by a devout

writer: "In every case these words usher in or commend truths of the deepest concernment to all, as we gather from a comparison of all the passages of greatest significance where they are used. The form of expression, 'He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches,' always is used of radical and, as it were, generative truths, great principles, and most precious promises, most deep fetches from the secrets of God—being, as it were, eyes of truth, seeds and kernels of knowledge."

From all these considerations how is it possible to overestimate the importance of the careful study of these messages? The burden of the charge so earnestly repeated is that we give to the epistles, so wonderful in themselves and so deeply stamped by the impress of Heaven, that intense study which they so eminently deserve. They are too significant to be passed over or slighted. There is much in them which claims far more than ordinary attention. It is required of us that we heed them with reverent attention.

### EXISTING SPIRITUAL EVILS.

As a pressing motive for our giving heed to the call in these communications from the heavenly throne, it may be urged that they would prove a panacea for the great spiritual evils of the present day. No devout heart that beats true to the interests of Zion but must feel the need of such a remedy. The low state of piety in all the churches is an evil which cannot be contemplated without pain to every soul that is sensitive to the glory of our Lord and the well-being of men. The prevalence of worldliness in its most alarming forms is a cause for intense anxiety. So great is the indifference of the masses to their immortal interests that the cry may well go up to the throne with the deepest solicitude: "It is time for thee, Lord, to work; for they have made void thy law!"

Then dangers still greater prevail from the insidious attacks which are made upon the very foundations of our holy religion. It is as if there was a deadly canker gnawing at the roots of all that was tried, and fair, and hopeful. We are pained by seeing many of the most splendid intellects straining their powers to impair confidence in the God-given directory to virtue and knowledge and peace; to deface and destroy all that is venerable and holy; to pull down what the centuries have proved most stable, to bring the discoveries of the age to bear with all their force against the bulwarks of Zion. Why such reckless and cruel as-

saults against a faith that, for so many centuries, has strengthened and borne up the hearts of the most loyal and true to God and to their fellow men! Who can help sorrowing that the Sabbath, with all its sanctifying influences, is assailed cruelly and persistently, that preaching and preachers are misrepresented and mocked; that newspapers on the Lord's day are crowding out the Bible and taking up the attention and time which should be given to God, and the soul, and eternity; that crime and dishonesty and immorality are filling up and depraving so much of the daily press; that a contest between labor and capital, most ominous in its possible issues, is waxing more and more fierce, and filling every thoughtful mind with dread as to the future. The most stout and faithful are becoming discouraged. Truth is slighted and wickedness exalted. It is possible that we exaggerate the gloomy prospect that is settling down upon the face of society; still, it cannot be concealed that there is much, very much, to discourage every lover of God and Zion. After making allowance for the propensity to exalt the past and decry the present, we cannot but dread the lowering evils of the times in which we live.

### WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

Then what is to be done? Where are the true and loyal friends of the kingdom to look? It cannot be endured that no voice shall be heard, and no helping arm shall be raised. Many human contrivances are resorted to; but very little advance in reaching the dense mass of ignorance and irreligion can as yet be seen. Societies of every kind are organized, temperance efforts are pressed, Christian skill exerted, missions established, and plans of collecting funds for benevolent purposes contrived; places of worship are made attractive, seats for the poor are set apart, and sensational preaching which would cause a blush to good sense and good taste is tried: all these efforts are made, yet still as a dark pall the evils rest upon the face of society. The evils under which humanity itself is groaning are not removed, nor even much abated; and churches are not filled. Sabbath desecration, and gross intemperance, and abominable uncleanness, and shameless frauds which shake the very foundations of society, are still cursing the community with very little check. The masses are not evangelized, and little impression is made upon the deep gloom and sorrow which reigning sin has produced.

GOD'S ORDAINED REMEDY.

Is this sad moral state to continue for ever? Must the masses of mankind remain bound hand and foot by sin and Satan while no effectual deliverance is to be found? Ye that love God, and Zion, and your suffering fellow men, can you bear to see this darkness and misery and despair still crushing out happiness and virtue and hope? Alas, so it would seem—and must seem, so long as we look on the human side, and rely on mere human wisdom! Here, however, a method of deliverance is opened—a method devised in heaven and offered to mankind; but never as yet appreciated, and never fairly tried. As an infallible panacea for the moral and spiritual evils of the times these messages from heaven are a mine unworked, a treasure unexplored. As such, they are placed at the close and climax of God's revealed plan for saving the lost race of men. As if the wisdom of all the ages were gathered together, and the experience of all the past centuries were concentrated in one point, and all as one blazing light were held up on high to be seen by all the ages, so this heavenly, never-failing remedy has been prepared and is offered for the scattering of darkness, the cheering in despair, and the upraising of the race, that is sinking in sin and misery.

This—how can we give it sufficient emphasis?—is the Heaven-ordained antidote for the spiritual ills of the days in which we are now living. Our glorious God and Father, Jehovah, the All-wise and Everlasting, has planned it for us and made it known in all Scripture, but especially in this most precious portion of the messages; how can it possibly fail of accomplishing his most gracious purpose? The experience of more than a hundred generations has proved its efficacy; assuredly it may be relied upon, and that without fear. Framed in accordance with the perfections of our Creator, and the sinful tendencies of the creature, there can be no doubt of its adaptation to the purpose for which it was intended. Placed here at the very climax of the divine revealings for the weal of the race which was regarded with such infinite compassion by the loving Lord, it will carry with it a most effectual deliverance. Given amid the anticipated evils of the ages of sin and sorrow, there can be no mistake as to its being the providential remedy which may be applied, now, as the one, the only, and the infallible cure for our deepest miseries. All else has been tried, but only to leave in despair, while here is

one that bears the stamp of the divine perfections; and shall it not be used with the utmost alacrity?

How wonderful is the gift of such a remedy for our worst evils, held up as a Beacon of promise and hope of deliverance, and adapted and intended for this age of so much irreligion and apostasy from faith and righteousness! Our gracious King in this earnest charge to his churches has opened the door of deliverance from sins and sorrows. Is not this the very aid that is needed? Is not this divine plan the best? Has it not been tested in instances sufficiently numerous to prove that it will be efficacious whenever it shall be faithfully used?

### SADLY IGNORED.

Without a doubt this is the great remedy which the sinful age needs, and yet how deplorably it is overlooked and neglected! All other plans and organizations are resorted to; but this one, which God himself, in his infinite grace and wisdom, has sent us on a special mission, is slighted. This may be seen by even the most casual observer. Where is there a determined looking into the significance of this portion of Scripture which is so peculiar and so well adapted to our present spiritual state? Where is the throwing of ourselves, with all our immortal interests, upon this God-provided remedy, through prayer and the earnest study of its nature and efficacy? Where is the resolute taking of our Lord at his word of warning and promise? Where is the faithful following of this word as our lamp and guide, our light, and joy, and only hope? Where is that earnestness of spirit, that wrestling with God day and night, as Jacob wrestled for life and safety—as Knox wrestled for his beloved Scotland—as Luther wrestled for the truth and for Germany, with an eagerness that would die or be heard? Where is the boldness of importunity that pleads God's own plans and promises? Where is the gazing up with streaming eyes upon the bright Beacon which tells of the only hope remaining for the lost race? Why are all other remedies so eagerly resorted to, while God's is so sadly neglected? Would that now—with every element of the messages lying before them, and the charge, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches," urged so strongly upon the churches—the sound were not only heeded, but every counsel it gives followed!

The great comfort and hope of the world is that in this Beacon of the ages our Lord has made just that promise which is needed

for such a time as this. Here is the very remedy that will meet the spiritual state of the community, over which the loyal heart of the believer cannot but bleed. It is adapted to the present as directly as if there were no other time or wants to be met by it, and does this not rise up as the one great hope of the church and the world? This panacea has only to be faithfully used, and mankind is saved. We must be in earnest in giving heed to this method of escape which God has provided. That it is God's ordained way of delivering us from our present low state of piety, and all the evils connected therewith, is evident. It is the Beacon raised high as the revelation closes, and which sends abroad a light that is most significant. It is evident from its care to include every condition of spirituality in every church; the cooling of its love in Ephesus, the hypocrisy in Sardis, the worldliness in Pergamos, the sensuality in Thyatira, and the lukewarmness in Laodicea, all are rebuked with special earnestness. It is evident from this earnestness with which warnings and promises are all pressed home, and the charge to give good heed repeated; from the manifest application of the words to all hearers of the messages; and from the location of the charge at the opening of the Apocalypse—indicating that it was intended to be the great law or principle that would pervade and influence all the developments of the Church's history.

The experience of all the generations that since then have passed away has proved that in these messages was contained the remedy which has saved the Church in all seasons of danger and depression. The charge comes home to us with all that is venerable, humane, and wise. It is prepared for every emergency, it is held aloft to be seen by every eye, and offered for every crisis of suffering and fear, as if God's own finger were seen pointing to it and indicating it to be his divine and never-failing antidote for all the evils that are crushing out happiness and hope.

### EFFECT, IF THE CHURCH HEEDED.

Convinced that all the contrivances of merely human origin would be in vain, let the friends of Christ and his cause resort with full purpose to the unfailing remedy which God himself has devised,—and the whole prospect of society is soon changed. This is the great point toward which all our studies have been aiming from the beginning. We are able to find no hope from all devices of men—we stand in despair; and then the Beacon of the ages flashes out before us in all its promises of deliverance. Our gracious Lord had it prepared for that very crisis which he knew

would certainly come. Our own utter helplessness and hopelessness are reached, and with them has come a crushing despair. We behold our wretchedness and danger, and are ready to abandon all effort; but just then we realize that our Lord has been providing for us, by maturing this remedy, well tried through many ages, and adapted to our every want and woe. Then do our souls become filled with hope and joy as we see the almighty arm made bare for our deliverance.

Such would most undoubtedly be the experience of the people of God, if this remedy—"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches"—so urgently pressed upon us, were heeded as thoughtfully as it deserves. Then would crushed-down and despairing Zion awake to new hopes and brightest prospects. The appeals, warnings, promises, and counsels in the messages would rise up as stirring realities. The whole body of believers would be moved by this stirring call as it sounded down from the heavenly throne. Each member of the Church would listen, as to a charge that was made directly to himself. As if his name were pronounced, and his place and work indicated, he would rush with glad alacrity to his assigned post of duty and sacrifice, and, assured of aid from the Almighty in that pre-eminent work, his prayer would ascend as fragrance from the smoking altar. Each individual believer being thus aroused, and every post of duty and danger instantly filled, the general movement would become radical, and, pressed on by the Holy Ghost, the whole moral and religious aspect of society would soon be changed, and become most promising. God's almighty arm having been made bare, the heavenly panacea is used, darkness and despair are driven away, and the Church is saved. Despairing of all human contrivances, she has listened to the heavenly call: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." Believers are sure that they are using the best, and only effectual, because the divine, remedy; and know that they have only to pray, and work, and wait, until darkness and despair shall be gone, and the Beacon of the ages, shining out brighter and more attractive, shall thrill every believing soul with the confidence and the strength which can come from the God of Zion only. What a scene of ecstatic joy will then be witnessed, as the charge, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches," shall be heeded by every ransomed child of God, and, as if in a glorious cloud of incense, the whole Church shall send up the prayer and the praise, which, the Spirit prompting, the Intercessor shall

receive, and present at the throne; and the whole world, throbbing under the mighty joys, shall soon be delivered.

### THE PRESENT AN ERA FOR TESTING IT.

We have been led to consider the present as a period of deep, widespread, and lamentable spiritual depression with all its concomitant evils. We have seen that, in the teachings of these messages to the churches, the Lord of Zion has provided a remedy for it that will never fail in its efficacy. Moreover, we can distinctly hear from him the urgent call upon us: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." Why shall we not heed it—heed it with an earnestness that shall be proportioned to the momentous interests that are at stake? Why shall we not as individuals, and as a branch of the great brotherhood of ransomed men, determine that, among us, the present shall become celebrated as an epoch wherein the divine remedy for the sorest evils of humanity shall have been fully proved? We have everything to awaken our interest, to stimulate our zeal, to direct our efforts, and to assure us of success. Never was there a period wherein such deliverance was more needed, or a people who had more facilities, or circumstances wherein everything was more ripe. Why then do we not, prompted by a holy ambition and deep-felt consciousness of need, determine that, in the strength of the almighty King of Zion, we will arouse every motive and press every agency, until we reach the great blessedness of beholding an era of deliverance and spiritual joy?

We find, even in a cursory review, that in God and his Word there has been provision made for every emergency and time of need which can ever arise in the history of the Church. A few instances will serve both to prove this and to illustrate what we mean. The Israelitish people were forming into a separate nation, and were in need of divine guidance, and of laws and customs suited to them as a people who would have the Lord Jehovah as their King: these were truly established by their witnessing the scenes of Sinai, and by the laws provided for them by God's own infinite wisdom. A crisis came when they needed an unerring directory of worship in the grand mission to which as a nation they were appointed: their divine Lord had it ready for them in the inspired book of sacred songs. The Church needed to know the nature of that glorious Messiah who had been promised them, and on whom their whole future depended: the in-

formation was provided in the marvelous prophecy: "The chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." The new kingdom of Christ had just been set up in the world—every eye was looking, and every heart asking, What is it to be? The answer was ready, in the wondrous Sermon on the Mount, of which the substance was: "Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Thus it is that evermore in his Word and in his providence our heavenly Father provides the precise remedy which shall be needed by his people in all their trials and dangers. It is so in the case before us. The present is a period of sore evils to the Church; but in these messages is the antidote to meet them all.

Here is the panacea which is needed by both the church and the world. The urgent call of God in the messages is that which is suited to all similar states of spiritual depression and danger; and now is an age in which to test its efficacy in restoring safety and prosperity. May it prove to be so in the history of the kingdom!

To that end, the first step is for us to consider our prevailing evils, and their divinely provided remedy. Each period must study the momentous subject for itself, inasmuch as the call to hear the message is manifestly intended for each and all times. Such study will very quickly reveal that the special wants of the age are provided for here. The remedy is here, and all depends on whether the Church shall heed or ignore the provision which God has made for her. Every motive of which we can possibly conceive presses hard upon us to awaken our souls to his divine voice. Our heavenly Father knows what we need; and here it is, pressed home upon us, in the most earnest tones. Shall he call so earnestly; shall the spiritual evils which face us on every side, call; shall the solemn warnings and promises of the messages that sound down to us from heaven, call;—shall all these call, and yet we turn away from them in heedless indifference, as if we would provoke the old reproach, "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?"

Shall not this heavenly summons be at least listened to? It is a special behest from our compassionate Lord, and should it not receive special attention? If the Church is ever to be delivered from the calamities which are now impending over her, she must heed the means appointed of God for her deliverance. The method of escape must be diligently considered by the awakened

soul. Languid thought and lifeless efforts will not do. The people of God must be in earnest in heeding the divine voice, and seeking the kingdom of God as if with sacred violence. As for life immortal must we heed the call of God, and search for Him who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. The charge of our Lord is unrepealed: "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me." So, especially, and with every faculty keenly alive, must we give the most earnest attention to this charge upon which the heart of our Lord was so earnestly fixed. We are in spiritual dangers and tempests; and as, in the raging storm, the captain of an imperiled ship stands at his post, consults every chart, heeds every shifting gale, and tries every art to save his charge: so must the Church put forth every effort to save that with which no wealth of earth can compare. It is now a time of storm and danger for the Church of God, and there comes to each one of her members a call from heaven itself that he consult every guide, try every plan, strain every energy, call in the help of every member, and leave no effort untried, to arouse himself and all others to awaken to the call of duty and the demands of the present crisis.

Be this an era in the history of the kingdom which shall be celebrated for the earnest heed of God's people to this his charge, and for the deliverance which he shall have wrought in response thereto! The need of this age is very great; every assurance is given, especially in the seven messages from the throne, that the faithful shall not appeal in vain for aid to Him who alone can help. Should the old call of Zion, "It is time for thee, Lord, to work: for they have made void thy law," be heard on every hand, we might be sure of soon seeing God's arm made bare. Evermore be this age remembered because of God's manifested faithfulness to this engagement!

### HEEDING THIS CALL—NOT HUMAN CONTRIVANCES.

It is of prime importance that we learn to resort to this divinely appointed remedy for existing spiritual evils, and not to the plans which men may devise. There is a strange proneness, among even professed believers, to form new schemes, and make new experiments, in order to meet the felt wants of the Church. Revivals, so called, are *gotten up*, with intent purpose, as if therein only could conversions be looked for. Anxious benches are resorted to, as if they were an indispensable part of the spiritual machinery.

Associations are contrived with elaborate plans; reforms are established, as if they alone were adapted to meet and counteract evils that are felt and mourned over; and sensational preaching is practised to startle, attract, and secure attention.

All such plans are devised, but this all-wise appointment of God himself in these messages is neglected. But is not he infinitely compassionate to feel for us and to know what we need, as well as to provide for it? Is not his mercy boundless in devising what his people require for their deliverance from sin and sorrow and danger? Are not his remedies in all their fullness provided and made known in these gracious messages which he sent to his Church? And are they not pressed home to the heart of every lover of Zion with the utmost earnestness by these warnings, and promises, and entreaties, the substance of which is: "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."

There come to us, therefore, the most pressing motives, that, for our deliverance from the evils of the low state of religion now prevailing, we resort to the Heaven-provided remedy, and not to the untried plans of human fancy. That we should depend on the fancied improvements of men is nothing less than an insult to our all-wise and all-gracious Lord, as if our own contrivances were better than his wisdom. The spirit of the age —this is the phantom after which the foolishness of men is striving! Improvements in theology, whether doctrinal or practical— for this they aim, and of this they boast as in the application of steam to the moving of machinery, or of electricity to the illumination of a city! How could the system of theology be improved? Was it imperfectly made known to us at the first, and must it now be amended? How can that which is absolutely true, and wise, and suitable, as was all that came from the hand of God, be made any better? Improvement in theology!—is not that impugning the character of what was at first revealed? Alas, this yielding to the spirit of the age is but yielding to the skeptical tendencies abroad which would tear down all that is tried, and holy, and venerable, without leaving anything upon which the soul can safely rest! Improvements in what God at first revealed, and which has stood the wear of eighteen hundred years, and made a conquering and martyr Church! Is the experience of all these centuries worth nothing? Because the world is alive with the daily intelligence of discoveries in the laws of nature, and improvements in the arts of living,

must the lovers of Zion be branded with the stigma of senility, because they will not abandon all that is tried, and venerable, and divine, and acknowledge themselves at sea as to all that upon which their souls rely for eternity? Is it not a grievous insult to the perfections of our glorified Lord to place his claims for our earnest attention on a par with the study of the laws of acoustics or the classification of fishes?

This plan of raising the Church out of her low and wretched estate is of God's ordaining, and therefore it can never be applied in vain. It has already been well tested and found to be certainly efficacious; then, why are time and thought and energy wasted on schemes which are the offspring of mere fancy and human contriving? Why follow leaders already found to be vain and selfish and ignorant? Nothing but the blinding effects of sin could thus mislead men as to their interests for eternity!

When will the people of God learn the lesson of a hundred generations, that no plans of merely human contriving will ever succeed in building up the true interests of the kingdom? When will the gracious call—"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches"—intended for just such crises at this, be heeded by the people of God, and lead to new life and joy and hope? It is an earnest call of God, that we use the Heaven-devised method. No improvement can possibly make better God's method of imparting life to his Church and saving the souls of men; why, then, neglect it for schemes that rest only on foundations of sand? Oh that the people of God could be induced to heed this most gracious summons from the heavenly throne, and then would soon be realized the efficacy of the prayer: "O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy."

As for every other age of the kingdom on earth, this urgent call of the messages is eminently the passage of Scripture for the present time; and why not study it and apply it, instead of speculating about the vagaries of "higher life," "Christian science," "faith cure," and other impracticable schemes, the very lowest charge against which is that they hide God's most plain and practicable plan of the gospel, and divert the mind from the one and only condition of faith, simple and strong, in Christ and his cross. The spirit of the age! What is it, or what can it do for the Church and the world, compared with this heavenly remedy, to which our gracious Lord summons every renewed heart, and every lover of his race? Why do we not resort to this plan of God with

true and loyal purpose? Why, as concerning another and momentous crisis of the kingdom, do we not heed this most earnest appeal of our dear Lord, when he cries concerning these messages: "Prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it."

### TRANSCENDENT IMPORTANCE OF THE MESSAGES, AND OF THE CALL TO HEED THEM.

These messages and this call appear to us of such unspeakable value that we cannot leave them. The effects of the gospel when it first came in contact with untaught and depraved pagan humanity, as it did in this region of the seven churches—how can we overestimate the value of the event as an example? What light it sheds upon the workings of the natural heart! What an illustration of the power of religion to change, elevate, and sanctify the most hopeless of mankind, whether as individuals or communities! In this aspect the value of these messages cannot possibly be exaggerated. As an element of the Beacon of the ages, it cannot be raised too high or made to beam too brightly. For a dying, suffering church or community, this gracious call of her Lord is an absolute specific. Blessed be the glorious Head of Zion that he has provided this unfailing and ever-ready panacea for the low and suffering estate of his Church!

It must impress us very deeply to contemplate our Lord's interest in this provided remedy and compare it with our own deplorable, guilty indifference. How he explains, repeats, calls, in words the most urgent and emphatic; and yet it would neither add to nor diminish his glory, while it is all in all to us, involving our bliss or misery for both time and eternity. What means this strange bewitchery of sin that keeps us from seeing and seeking the undying interests of our soul? Not only is the individual soul at stake; the spiritual welfare of the Church and community is also involved. The messages are for the whole Church. Attention to this call will produce a happy change in the moral and religious state of the whole body of God's people: surely, then, we should heed the charge with which God presses his messages home upon our hearts and consciences!

It is very significant how wide and general this call is made upon every hearer and reader: "He that hath an ear." Whoever hears—any one, anywhere—is urged to heed; and there is something that is specially suited to every case. No hearer of

these words but will find some part of the charge addressed to him. As on one occasion while among men in the flesh, our Lord virtually urges: "What I say unto you, I say unto all." To all is the charge; but especially to all pastors. "For one who has undertaken the awful ministry of souls, I know almost nothing in Scripture so searching—no threatenings so alarming, no promises so comforting, as are some which these epistles contain."

It is a great mercy in our Lord, to lay on his people such a solemn charge to give heed to his teachings. To charge the Ephesians to return to their first love; the church of Smyrna, to suffer tribulation willingly; of Pergamos, to free themselves from seducing teachers; and of Sardis, to shun hypocrisy—are all marks of his fatherly care; but more gracious than all is the strong obligation which urges that they earnestly heed the calls of the Spirit. What blessed results would follow! Then would the faithful be permitted to eat of the tree of life; they would not be hurt of the second death; they would share the dearest friendship of their Lord; they would receive power over the nations; they would walk in white amid the glorified; they would be pillars in the heavenly temple, and they would share the throne with their exalted Lord. Then also would the children of God hear the stirring call, and realize the blessing most sublime: "Arise, shine! for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee." Supposing the heavenly summons were heeded by believers generally, and laid to heart, and obeyed, what scenes of new life, and spiritual joy, and blessed conversions, would soon be witnessed! What mourning for sin! what multitudes asking the way to Zion with their faces thitherward! what rapture over souls snatched as brands from the burning! what newness of hope, and life, and principles! what joy in the presence of the angels of God over, not "one," but multitudes of sinners that repent. Then, only then, when the faithful hear and heed the Spirit's earnest words thrilling down into their inmost souls shall the bewitchery of sin be banished, their eyes be enlightened, and they be enabled to gaze upon the rainbow around the Great White Throne.

It is not man, but an enthroned Lord himself who gives the solemn charge. He sends down this special and urgent message to us; and shall we not heed it with all the intensity of our souls? The subjects involved are those into which angels desire to look; and shall not we, whose immortal weal is at stake, give most earnest attention? In the Spirit's words we appeal to every reader:

Heed, oh heed the solemn charge! It is our Lord himself who speaks to you, as urgently now as to the seven churches of Asia. Hear! for upon our doing so or not doing so is suspended the question whether the churches shall lie still where they are—so lifeless, so cheerless, so inconsistent, so wretched; or arise to a new, a bright, and a holy future.

# CHAPTER XXIII.

## KEY-NOTE OF THE APOCALYPSE.

THE first six verses of the book of Revelation are a sort of introduction, not to the messages to the seven churches alone, but also to the whole Apocalypse. After this, and the greeting to the faithful of the churches, follows the doxology of the ransomed of every age and nation: "Unto him that loved us and washed us in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion, for ever and ever: amen." Then comes the fundamental thought of the whole book: "*Behold, he cometh!*" This is undoubtedly the key-note of all that follows. It is presented in such form as to indicate that it is to be the theme of all. It stands at the opening of the most magnificent views of Christ and of his kingdom, as that kingdom is yet to be developed among the children of men. The words are amongst the sublimities of our Lord's stupendous plans in reference to our race. They open vistas over the everlasting hills and into the gates of the New Jerusalem; and it is not too bold, nor irreverent, to gaze intently upon them. The beloved disciple—the great New Testament seer, in sublime vision, is so elevated in spirit that the things that are future and celestial are made to pass before him so far as was needed for the guidance of the people of God in all after ages. The name of the Son of God is pronounced—in an instant his eye brightens, his soul is elated. The exclamation breaks out from his enraptured soul: "*Behold, he cometh!*" This was the substance of all. The whole track of his advent, from that rapturous hour, until the climax of the great Day of His Espousals, was then lying before him. All were concentrated in those arousing words: "*Behold, he cometh!*"—is coming. This was the meaning of all that was to pass before him. His second coming was beginning that hour, its marvelous events were to sweep on, until all creatures would be assembled around the great white throne on the Judgment-day. The name of Jesus awakened the soul-stirring exclamation—it is to be followed by scene after scene of more excelling glory.

The enraptured prophet cried out in ecstasy, "Behold, He is coming!" In that vision, more sublime than had ever before been witnessed by mortal eyes, the highly favored seer first beheld, coming from afar, the glorified Son of man. He gazes on. The majestic Lord draws nearer and nearer. He is approaching. He is at hand. He beholds him coming! All else seems lost sight of in that enrapturing vision. He sees the glorified Son of God, with whom he had spent such blessed hours in the old days of earth. He calls upon all others to look, as does one who directs attention to a new and thrilling fact—as one who was himself bewildered by a scene of indescribable glory. His heart-stirring words are: "He is coming!"—not, He will come, even in the near future—but, He *is* coming—coming now! Nearer and nearer he approaches. The prophet beheld him coming down from the heavenly hills. He was coming then, when these words were uttered. He was then on the way. Ever since then he has been on the way. He is so now. At every moment of the ages, it might be said: "The Lord is at hand." At every moment, as in the text, might go up the cry: "*Behold, He cometh!*" Behold, all ye who have eyes to see, and hearts to feel, or souls to admire! —the Lord is coming!

The coming of Christ is the fundamental thought of the whole book of Revelation. Every part is written, animated, influenced, guided, and colored by this great watchword found at its opening: "*Behold, He cometh!*" This is the key by which all its mysteries can be unlocked. Applying this at every point we shall have unerring guidance, and a light that will make all things plain. Indeed, there is scarcely a question that the book of Revelation is itself the coming of Christ. When the scenes of that marvelous communication passed before the eyes of the prophet—that was the coming of Christ in his providential and divine footsteps. His coming again was this Revelation. How marvelous the thought and marvelous the glory!—here, in the majestic vision, is the coming of our Lord! These are his footsteps, as, through the centuries, he draws nearer and nearer! Both in the providences which guided to the book of Revelation, and in the Spirit which inspired its writing, we have the coming of Christ in living and glorious fact. He is coming, and hence all these stupendous movements both in the Church and in the world.

It is to be lamented that this subject of the coming again of our Lord does not receive from us more earnest thought and attention. In the whole of that future which lies before us there

is nothing so momentous as this, and yet there is scarcely anything which is so little in our hearts and minds. Alas that it should be so! The unspeakable sublimity of the thought that Christ, our Lord, is coming again; the high and holy mysteries that are connected therewith, the grand prophetic scenes that are associated with its approach, the intimate connection which everything evinces that it is to have with all the future destinies of our race, and the evident stress which is laid on it in the inspired page,—all these make it manifest that we have sinfully neglected this important subject, that it should be far more in our thoughts, that we should live and act with reference to it, that we should pray for it, and look for it, and prepare for it.

It can scarcely fail of notice that in all that is made known to us concerning the second coming of our Lord we have nothing more revealed to us than the leading events connected therewith. The more minute things are generally omitted, and we have no more than the essential points. Little more is communicated than, "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him: even so, amen." Nearly all is here; and the "Amen" would seem to intimate that this is all that was intended to be communicated. We are not to know the minute things; we are to know only the leading sublimities, and then prepare for his coming. As to all others we are to exercise our faith, by leaving them all to God, and waiting.

### GREAT STRESS UPON IT IN SCRIPTURE.

No one can take even a cursory glance over the New Testament, with this subject in his mind, without being deeply impressed that the coming again of our Lord was an event in the future of the very greatest moment. In no less than eighteen instances our Lord himself refers to it in most emphatic terms. In the mind of our Lord himself it manifestly stood next to his death and ascension in the glorious achievement of redeeming the lost world. Not only was it continually in his own mind, but he makes it manifest that he would also have his people look forward to it as an event of infinite importance. He would have them fix their hearts upon it above all else in the future which they were to expect.

Because of the constant stress which our Lord laid on the subject it is clearly our duty as well as interest to labor to have our minds filled with it—so filled with it as to look upon it as the one

great all-absorbing movement of the kingdom which is to finish the enterprise of the Son of God in redeeming the world. To that end we glance first at Christ's earnest words concerning his coming, which he uttered on the memorable last night with his disciples. "If I go and prepare a place, I will come again." "I will not leave you comfortless; I will come again." "Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you." "And again a little while, and ye shall see me." "But I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice." "I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day when I shall drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." How full his heart must have been with the thought of again meeting his disciples, since he so repeatedly refers to it in this farewell interview! And that is not all; but on many other occasions does the thought break out from his overflowing heart. In a rebuke of the impetuous Peter by the Sea of Galilee he says: "If I will that he tarry *till I come*, what is that to thee?" Then, how many of his parables have this as their great central point? He was as a great King, who, for a time, was to be absent on a long journey; but his heart was set on his coming back again, and this was the event for which his people were to be constantly looking. In fact this was the very fruit and core of many of his parables. Most remarkable of all is the prominence of the subject throughout all this book of Revelation. In the epistles to the churches we hear: "But that which ye have already, hold fast till I come." But in the last chapter—the closing chapter of the whole Bible—it becomes the most impressive of all. As if he was uttering his farewell to the Church and world, no less than three times over does he repeat, "Behold, I come quickly." And then, the very last: "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen, even so, come, Lord Jesus."

Such are specimens of Christ's own earnest words concerning his coming again to his Church and the world. We find the same often repeated by the inspired writers. Among such assurances, we hear from the lips of the angels, as, with the disciples, they gaze upon the ascending Son of man: "This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." Most significantly did the great apostle write to the Corinthian believers: "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death, *till he come*." To the Thessalonians the same apostle writes concerning that day "when he shall come to be glorified in his

saints," and still again, to the believing Hebrews: "For yet a little while, and he that shall come, will come, and will not tarry."

From all these passages, and many others like them, it is certain that this coming of Christ denotes something of vital interest to Christ and his cause, something that was resting on his mind which was of the utmost moment. So often does he refer to it that it must be connected with most solemn realities.

### WHAT EVENT SPECIALLY INTIMATED.

There is a characteristic of prophecy which we must endeavor to understand. It is that the predictions of Scripture very frequently refer with equal directness to two or more future events. Sometimes the same words of promise or threatening are applicable to various events which lie in the same line of fulfillment. For instance, the same words at once predicted the fall of Jerusalem, the calamities of after ages, and the final destruction of the world, or either one of them, or all of them at once. Sometimes a prediction refers to one future event, sometimes to another, in an established line of events, sometimes to several of them at once, and sometimes to all. This is a characteristic of Scripture prophecy of vast importance, and we shall not make much progress in such studies without understanding it.

Let us apply it to the questions before us—that is, to the coming of our Lord. In the sacred pages we find predictions of that event which must refer to one thing here, to another there, and to still others elsewhere. At first sight this appears to present difficulty that is insurmountable; but this principle makes all plain. The prediction of Christ's coming we expect to find fulfilled in several distinct events—all having the same general bearing; all being related to each other; all having subordinate fulfillments; and all culminating in one sublime event for which all the previous ones were preparing.

Using this key, we find, *first*, that the prediction of the coming again of Christ means the promise of his coming in *the gracious outpouring of his Spirit on the day of Pentecost*. Of this there cannot be a doubt. The chief engagement concerning it was: "I will not leave you comfortless; I will come to you." The connection makes it obvious that this meant his coming by the Holy Ghost. It is in the same line with his other promise: "A little while, and ye shall not see me; and again a little while, and ye shall see me: because I go unto the Father." In accordance with this engagement, he came gloriously to his infant Church

on the day of Pentecost; and every other revival season with which his people have ever been blessed, has been another of his comings in the power of his Spirit.

A *second* fulfillment of Christ's promise that he would come again was *in his providential visitations, either for chastisement or for blessing.* He gave utterance to this prediction quite frequently. In his messages to the seven churches we find it again and again. To Ephesus: "Repent, and do thy first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." To Pergamos: "Repent, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against thee with the sword of my mouth." To Philadelphia: "Behold, I come quickly!" To the church of Sardis: "If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come upon thee as a thief in the night." These passages show clearly that providential events, whether prosperous or adverse, are often described as comings of Christ. Thus does he often come either to restrain or to encourage his people.

In the *third place*, Christ is often spoken of as coming *to his people when they die.* We see this in his words, "Therefore be ye also ready; for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of man cometh." This obviously refers to his coming at the hour of death, as the connection clearly manifests. At the moment when the soul of the believer shall pass into glory, then shall it behold the exalted Son of God in all that radiant glory which beamed out from him on the mount of Transfiguration.

A *fourth coming* of Christ is that which was threatened at *the destruction of Jerusalem.* Of that we have the proof in the passage where the overthrow of the temple is foretold, and in connection therewith are the ominous words: "So shall also the coming of the Son of man be." At that time he manifested his power, and justice, and truth, by destroying those who had wickedly crucified him, rejected his mercy, and hardened themselves in their atrocious rebellion against the Most High.

A *fifth coming* predicted will be in *the conversion of the whole world.* Of this we have the assurance in such passages as that wherein it is promised: "He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass; as showers that water the earth. . . . . He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth." This is a most impressive and beautiful promise of his coming in the conversion of mankind.

A *sixth form* in which his advent is predicted is in *that of a*

*Judge*, at the end of the world, to finish the career of his Church and bring in everlasting righteousness. This will be the climax of all other comings; and the language used concerning it is the most solemn and awful of which we can conceive. As a specimen we may cite the words of the first evangelist: "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory; and before him shall be gathered all nations." After this the awful scenes of the Judgment are fully depicted.

We may thus see that there are at least six events which are described as comings again of our Lord,—all of which are expressed in the same language, which are linked together in a series, which may be regarded either separately, or in one view, and which all culminate in the one final scene of the Judgment. Together we may behold them as his coming in the destruction of the doomed Jerusalem; in the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost; in various providential visitations; in the death of the individual believer; in the glories of the millennium; and in the scenes of the Judgment-day. All these are distinct and momentous comings again of our ascended Lord Jesus.

## TOTALITY OF EVENTS IN THE KINGDOM FROM PENTECOST TO THE JUDGMENT.

We have now reached a point in our investigations where it becomes necessary, and where we ought to be prepared to answer the question: What event or events, precisely, are indicated on the inspired pages by the oft-repeated "Behold, he cometh!" his "coming again," "when he cometh," and other similar expression? There are few points which it is of more importance for us to understand than this. Unless we do so understand its meaning it will be impossible for us to comprehend the teachings of the passages with which they stand connected. All depends upon our knowing what this means; and, in most cases, it is associated with subjects which are of vital importance both to individuals and to the Church generally in all its interests and duties.

At the same time there are few points which it is more difficult for us to comprehend and on which there are more vague opinions —if, indeed, we must not add, concerning which most readers have no well-defined conceptions whatever. "Behold, he cometh!" How very few there are who can explain what coming this denotes—what the event is to be, when it is to occur, and what are to be its accompaniments!

Our *theory*, carefully wrought out, is that the expressions "Behold, he cometh," "come again," "when He shall appear," and all similar phrases, do not refer to any one special event exclusively, *but to the whole mass of movements in the divine kingdom of which our Lord is the centre, from his ascension back to the bosom of his Father until all culminate in the last Judgment.* "*Behold, he cometh!*" The whole tissue of occurrences regarded as one glorious body of providences, whether great or small, but measuring out the progress of the divine kingdom, and beginning on the day when our Lord ascended in the clouds, and reaching its climax when he returns to receive the homage of the universe,—this is his "coming." It is the entirety of all these taken in the mass. They are taken as one grand accumulation of providences, some portion of which is transpiring at every instant of the included ages, and so making strictly true that he is coming every moment. From this comes to pass the most marvelous thing that, at any moment of the passing ages, it may be said with absolute sincerity: "*Behold, he cometh!*" To us, without question this is the key which unlocks the meaning of the words. It opens the meaning at every point, gives significance to every view of the sublime announcement, enables us to open every mystery, and introduces us into glory after glory which our blessed King has in store for his people.

Professor Kurtz, of the University of Dorpat, Germany, in his *Manual of Sacred History*, presents the subject in a form that is most satisfying—so much so that we give his views in full: "The 'coming' of the Lord, when he shall hold the judgment, and perfect all things, *is not an isolated event, but is much rather the culminating point of a "coming" which is felt throughout the entire history of the ages.* Every interposition of the omnipotent Ruler and Judge of the world who sits on the right hand of Omnipotence, every progressive movement of his kingdom, every victory which he gains over his enemies, and every judgment which overtakes them, is a coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. All that shall be completed by his coming on the day of Judgment is prepared and developed in the progress of the preceding centuries by his uninterrupted and continued coming. It began with his ascension to heaven; it closes on the day of Judgment. The former or gradual coming is distinguished from his final coming by the peculiar mode of his appearance. The former is hidden and invisible action, of which the eye of faith alone can obtain a glimpse or a full view; the latter is the action of

the Lord which shall be revealed and be made visible to the whole world. The former merely designs to open the way, and is consequently often hidden in its form; the second coming designs to fulfill and complete, and is consequently characterized by infinite splendor and glory, is preceded by startling and impressive signs, is full of majesty when it occurs, and is both unspeakably glorious and unspeakably terrible in its effects."

Dean Alford of England says: "*The coming again of the Lord is not one single act*—as his resurrection, or the descent of the Spirit, or his second personal advent, or the final coming to judgment: *but the great complex of all these*, the result of which will be his taking his people to himself, to be where he is."

Such we believe to be the deep spiritual import of the expression "Behold, He cometh!" In brief, we look upon it as the expression for the totality of all the leading events in the kingdom of Christ from the day of Pentecost to the day of Judgment. It is not his simple return to his Church after his ascension amid the glories of Olivet—take this in what view we may—nor any, nor all, of his appearances until the Judgment, nor his marvelous proclamation in Patmos, heralding to all his people, "I am alive for evermore," nor the starting of the Rider upon the white horse, for the conquest of death and hell; it was not any one of these scenes, magnificent as we may conceive them to have been, but it was the whole mass of the events which pertain to our glorified Lord and his kingdom, beginning with his triumph over death, the grave, hell, and Satan; and then advancing onward and upward, until the promised day of redemption, when, as the High Priest of our profession, and divine Prophet, before whom all worlds and ages lie clearly exposed, and supreme King, before whom every knee is bending, he shall triumphantly take the throne over the universe, and reign supreme and evermore. This is the significance of the glorious mystery, "Behold, he cometh!"

### SPECIAL CONNECTION WITH THE SEVEN EPISTLES.

Without a doubt there is some peculiar relation existing here between the messages and this announcement of the coming of our Lord in his glory. There is such a remarkable juxtaposition of the two and such an infusion of their parts into each other, that there must have been an intentional connection and dependence upon each other. The close of the one seems the opening of the other, as if they were bound together in the closest and

strongest bonds. In the two chapters which contain the messages to the churches the coming again of our Lord is referred to no less than six times. What the nature of that connection is, and what the process of the thought which it involves, it is not very difficult for us to interpret. When we attempt its analysis, we *first* encounter the radical fact that *the coming again of Christ* is the key-note of the whole passage. Every point is and must be grouped around this. It is the centre which gives coherence to every part, and by means of which all must be interpreted. "Behold, he cometh!" stands at the opening of the Apocalypse, and from it we must look away over every point in our investigations. It is the head, the preface, the sum of all; and the more closely we study it, the more impressed shall we become that it is woven into the whole tissue of the book of Revelation.

Then, inasmuch as the messages to the churches are the first component division of that book, we must begin by investigating the relation of the coming and the messages. And the general statement of that relation is that the messages are the preparation for the coming. The substance is that in their relation we have the old cry of our Lord's parable: "Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him." This element of the parable is to meet a fulfillment here in the opening scenes of the kingdom as portrayed in the New Testament Apocalypse. In a word, the messages are the embodiment of the preparation which is needed for the coming again of our Lord. All that is needed to ensure readiness for his appearing is contained here. Here is the rousing call to Church and world to get ready to meet him. That appearing will be the most momentous of all coming events, and the summons is to get ready for it; to awake and realize its importance; to attend; to look for its sublime developments; to stand ready, and waiting. He is to come back to our sin-cursed earth—but now in triumph! When he comes it will be as the Conqueror who has subdued every enemy, and as leading captivity captive, and with gifts of priceless value to men. He will come with power and great glory, to gather up the spoils of the battle-field, on which the powers of darkness had been vanquished, to triumph gloriously and to take the throne supreme and eternal. Such will be that return whose description opens with "Behold, he cometh with clouds;" its course, with "I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End;" its climax, with "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly."

It is very easy to see how well adapted the messages are to

prepare the soul for the reception of its Lord at his glorious return. We can see this in the stirring call which so affected the inspired seer that he "fell down as one dead;" in the menace to the indifferent, "I will come as a thief in the night;" in the promise to the faithful, "I will grant to sit with me in my throne;" and in the earnest appeals to the love, the gratitude and the honor of the redeemed; to the sublime attributes of Him who dwelleth amid the golden candlesticks; and to all other high and holy motives by which the soul can be influenced.

In addition to the motives which are so well calculated to arouse to the exalted work of preparation, the messages also indicate the methods of preparing and the attainments which may be reached by all those who long for the coming of their Lord. They teach how we are to prepare to meet him. They are all intended as a special preparation for this marvelous and momentous event. The coming is to be one magnificent process of sublime incidents, the sweep of which is through unknown centuries, and in the messages we have the Spirit's teachings as to how we may be ready to meet them; and all are made part of the Beacon of the ages, as a guide for every church and for every earnest soul.

### EVENTS OF THE AGES THE FOOTSTEPS OF HIS COMING.

We have repeated the opinion that the expression "Behold, he cometh!" does not refer to any one distinct event, but to the whole mass of events, connected with Christ and his kingdom, beginning with Pentecost, and running on until the great Day of the Lord, when Christ shall appear again to judge the world. In this there are three periods of the kingdom which require distinct notice—namely, the ascension of our Lord, with his return to the bosom of his Father; then, the lapse of ages it will require to work out the destiny of the Church; and then, the sublime consummation of all things, when Christ shall take the throne. All the three are included in the sublime promise that he will come again. The first and the last come before us in other connections. For the present, we are to consider the lapse of the long intervening ages. This also is an essential element of the coming again of Christ. Its momentous periods are but his footsteps, from his ascent on Olivet to his descent again to take the throne, and judge the quick and the dead, who shall be gathered before him from every region of the world and every period of time.

It is declared of him that he is "Alpha and Omega," the beginning and the end—to each of these it is obvious that he will come in great glory, or that he has come; but in all the intervening sublimities he will also be the chief agent, and this will constitute each of these one of his distinct comings, and form them, in their mass, into his one glorious advent to finish the work of redemption, and bring in everlasting righteousness. Regarded in one aspect as they lie before the omniscient eye of Jehovah, they are the stupendous process of our Lord's return again, and each vast movement in the kingdom is a stage of his coming. The roll of the passing ages, the events which thrill the world, the principles which are discovered and wrought out by thoughtful minds, are stations in the progress of centuries. His coming footsteps may be traced by the earnest student of providence—in the rise and fall of kingdoms; in the raising up of eminent men for the accomplishing of God's purposes; in the important changes which come to churches; in the establishing of great institutions of learning; in the maturing of schemes for the spreading abroad of the knowledge of the way of life; in great religious movements which arise from time to time, and in innumerable other things by which, from age to age, the history of the kingdom has been influenced.

All these are the footsteps of our Lord as he draws nearer to his waiting Church. They mark the progress of his coming. Moreover, these movements of the kingdom which mark the coming of our Lord are not only most momentous, but they are also linked together in such a manner as to show that they are all tending forward toward the same grand manifestation of our Lord—the King. Each one of them is preparatory for the next in the divine plan. They are not isolated or disconnected events, but are linked together in wondrous magnificence, and work together to prepare the way for his coming, to which the Church is taught to look forward as the culmination of all the glories of the kingdom.

All the events of the future are appointed elements of this glorious manifestation. All the affairs of this world are providentially carried on with reference to Christ's coming again. While he is away, he has left the interests of his kingdom in the hands of his servants; and, in due time, he will return and take them back into his own. All things on earth and in heaven are looking steadfastly for that return. All the affairs of his own spiritual kingdom are ordered with a direct reference to it.

All the advances in arts and sciences and improvements are carrying forward their parts of preparation for it. All the kings and kingdoms of mankind are so shaping the powers of the world that when he comes they shall be ready to yield up to him the supreme throne over them all.

These are his footsteps as, through the centuries, he draws nearer and nearer. Both in the providences which guided to the book of Revelation, and in the Spirit who inspired its writing, we have the coming back of Christ in full and glorious prediction. He is coming, and hence all these stupendous movements both in the Church and in the world. As we look into the subject, in this aspect, we cannot but be impressed that we are plunged into the midst of sublimities the most glorious. How sublime is the thought that Christ our Lord is coming again!—the thought of the high and holy mysteries that are connected therewith; of the grand prophetic scenes it will reveal; of the intimate connection that everything evinces it will in some way have with all the future destiny of our race; and of the evident stress which is laid on it in the sacred pages;—all these considerations make it most manifest that this is a subject which it is of the utmost moment for the people of God earnestly to study and improve.

### CRISIS OF HIS COMING.

In our effort to analyze the import of the rousing cry, "Behold, he cometh!" we have considered first, the starting-point of that coming at the ascension of our Lord back to the bosom of the Father; then its sublime progress through the intervening ages; we now direct our thoughts to its close, at the end of the world, in his final coming to receive his people into glorious union from which they shall be separated no more. Then shall be the culmination of his comings, in which the purpose of all the intermediate comings shall be revealed.

At that final appearance of Christ it will be seen that every other manifestation of the Son of God, however insignificant it may have been considered at the time, was in preparation of the way for that one which was the greatest and grandest of them all. It will be the closing, on the day of Judgment, of that which began with his ascension into heaven. It will be the completion of that grand process of preparation which had been conducted throughout the ages. That process, running through all the centuries of time, is well defined and most important in

its results. Every stage of it can be traced, step after step, until all culminates in this grandest manifestation of all. We can see the process very clearly, in the providing of a people by the Spirit on the day of Pentecost who would constitute the kingdom of our Lord; in the removing of obstacles by the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple; in the training of the elect through the discipline of Providence; in the gathering home by death of the successive generations of the saints; in the many precious revival seasons which strengthened the kingdom age after age; in spreading the Gospel through the nations of the world by the millennial influences; and then in the grandest event of all, when the Son of man would appear in all his glory.

Such would be the process of preparation which would make way for the coming of our Lord; and then would he appear in all his glory. The great New Testament seer, raised in spirit into the midst of coming glories, beholds the process, stage after stage, of preparation, until all terminates in the one final and most glorious climax, and then in sacred ecstasy cries out: "Behold, he cometh!" "Behold, he cometh!" for whom the people of God had been so long waiting—"waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ;" anxiously expecting "the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." "How long, O Lord, how long?" had been the earnest cry of the weary ages; and now was to be the glad answer from the throne; now was the rapturous sight, when the waiting, watching Church exclaims: "Behold, he cometh!" The long, long journey through so many ages is ended, and the ransomed are at home with their glorious Lord.

All the messages to all the churches were framed with this in view. With this blissful announcement we get at the inner meaning of "I will come as a thief" in the night; "I will give thee a crown of life;" "I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels," and many another wonderfully marvelous declaration of the epistles to the churches. In this, too, we have the deeper meaning of our Lord's words, "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending"—for never before was there such a magnificent culmination as that which shall be witnessed in the final coming of our Lord to finish the glorious work of redeeming the lost race of mankind; for that enterprise will then be completed, and the end come. The end reached, the Son of man appearing in his glory, the great Day of the Lord arrived,—is not all this a suiting climax of the

advent of Him who takes the throne supreme, as King of kings and Lord of lords?

### WHEN WILL IT BE?

One of the first questions concerning this event is: When will it come to pass? What period of time is indicated by the announcement: "Behold, he cometh?" If the process indicated by it is already going on, when will it come to an end? When will be that magnificent climax in which the glorious return of our Lord shall be witnessed? When will *that great day* arrive? "The promise of his coming—when shall it be fulfilled?" has been the earnest question of the centuries long since passed away, as it is their earnest question still.

But it is a question the answer to which God has not seen fit to reveal to any of his creatures. For the wisest of reasons, no doubt, he keeps it hidden from the knowledge of both men and angels. Not only is the time of our Lord's coming hidden as a matter of fact; but we are also informed that it is intentionally kept concealed from the knowledge of mortals. That great mystery is very positively asserted. Concerning it the divine record is made: "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only." Moreover, there is very great stress laid on the fact that the time has not been revealed, and is not even intended to be revealed; for it is often repeated, and that in the strongest language, as if it were a matter of much importance. Why it is so important, we are informed only in part. What good purpose is to be accomplished thereby we can understand but imperfectly, and as for everything else in the future, we must wait God's good time for making it known. Certain it is that if we knew fully the time of life's ending with us—especially if the time were near, it would tend to paralyze effort, and keep us back in inactivity. But God, in his infinite wisdom, knows best, and so he has kept this knowledge to himself, as he has all the future excepting so far as the highest interests of the souls of men and the vital interests of his kingdom may demand. Only one reason does he give us for not revealing the time of the coming of our Lord in the glory of the Last Day. That one reason is that we may thereby be led to constant *watchfulness;* for what is there that would be so likely to produce untiring vigilance as his oft-repeated—"*Behold, I come quickly!*"

"I COME QUICKLY!"

"*I come quickly*," is a declaration of our ascended Lord which is made so solemnly, repeated so frequently, and always uttered with so much emphasis that there must be something of very great importance involved in it.

We should first awake to a realization of the great prominence which is given it on the sacred pages. Most significant is it that this is the last sound the inspired volume would leave in our ears, as if it was intended to go on for evermore. "He which testifieth these things saith, 'Surely, I come quickly. Amen.'" Our Lord's very significant warning is: "Watch ye, therefore; for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning; lest, coming suddenly he find you sleeping." Again, his solemn caution is: "Therefore, be ye also ready; for in such an hour as ye think not, the Son of man cometh." In one of Paul's epistles we find these earnest words: "For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night." In the writings of the apostle Peter we are solemnly admonished: "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and the works that are therein shall be burned up." From the lips of our Lord we hear the words: "For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be."

It would be easy to multiply to any extent such predictions as these concerning the sudden and unexpected time and manner in which our Lord shall appear when he shall come again to that Church which he has left for a season. What means this? How is it that his coming is always at hand? How is it that he will come so suddenly? For full answer we must wait for future revealings of our Lord. These are incomprehensible mysteries for the unfolding of which we must wait until we shall reach the clear light that shines on the other side of the river which forms the boundary of this land of darkness. But even with this obstacle in our way, there is one thing we know well. The return of Christ, no matter how long delayed, will be sudden and unexpected at the last. So it always has been in all his appearings. So it still is; for we always find that, no matter how long the fatal disease may linger, at last the closing scene comes

in an unexpected moment. And, no doubt, it will be the same until the close of all things. Every coming of our Lord will be at a time when he is least expected. This seems to be the established rule of the divine procedure; and we may be certain that he will not depart from it in this the most important appearing of all.

There is one aspect of this often-repeated expression, "I come quickly," which calls for special consideration, inasmuch as it involves that which meets every thoughtful student of the Bible. The difficulty is obvious. The expression is found in so many different connections, and refers to so many different events, that it seems wellnigh impossible to reconcile them with each other, or to explain what the precise reference is, in any given connection. Besides, it has been associated with so many different promises, wherein it was not fulfilled soon after it was made—has not even yet been fulfilled, though ages have passed since then, and to all appearance never can be fulfilled—that a solution of the question becomes extremely perplexing. Then, of course, skepticism has laid hold of the difficulty and pressed it with all alacrity. It has been used scoffingly, as was the old objection of many centuries ago, "Where is the promise of his coming?" You claimed that he would appear very soon. Did he? Generation after generation has passed away, and you have still asserted that he was at the door; but where is he? What appearance is there that he is any nearer now than he was generations ago? The fathers were born, lived, and fell asleep in death; but they never saw him as it had been promised them. What confidence can there be in such engagements, or in those who made them?

Even when the objection is not pressed to such extremity, still there remain even to the friendly inquirer the difficulties as to how such promises of speedy fulfillment are to be reconciled. "I come quickly," as to the outpouring of the Spirit; "I come quickly," as to the millennial glories; "I come quickly," as to the appearing of the great Day of the Lord; and others like these —the same words as to such different events, and still some of them even yet not fulfilled, and, from the nature of the case, not possible to be fulfilled for ages to come. How is the difficulty to be met? Even the most devout believer longs to find the solution of a question involving a mystery which sorely perplexes him.

In response to those who honestly desire a suitable explanation

of the difficulty it may be said that there are three principles involved in the subject, one or other of which will abundantly meet each case, or all applied will make the whole difficulty disappear. (1) In the sight of God, with whom "a thousand years are but as one day," it will be a fact that our Lord's coming on the last day will be very quickly indeed, after the time when he ascended up to heaven from Olivet. (2) As we have already seen that in the track of the ages between Pentecost and the Judgment there would be many comings of the Lord to his people in either mercy or chastisement; then there would always be a certain nearness to each of these, in which it could be said, "I come quickly." Every step of the track would be a coming, and involve a "quickly" just before it. (3) Every coming of our Lord, as we have already seen, no matter how long time may have been taken up in preparing the way for it, would be sudden and unexpected at last. It can be seen at a glance that these three principles abundantly cover every conceivable case. Especially is this true of the last of the three; for whether the Lord comes in scenes of Pentecost, or in the death of the individual believer, or at the Judgment, it will be unexpected, sudden, "in the twinkling of an eye"—rendering most strictly appropriate the declaration, "I come quickly."

This illustration of the manner of Christ's coming as suddenly and unexpectedly as a thief in the night is one which he himself uses so frequently that it must manifestly have very great significance. Two or three times in the Gospel by Matthew, and again in Luke, the very words are used, or the thought is repeated. Our Lord uses the expression again and again; and his servants warned repeatedly: "The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night;" "That day shall overtake you as a thief." As the thief gives no notice of his approach, so unexpectedly will our Lord come again; and hence our solemn duty to watch for him with all intenseness. Most appropriate are Augustine's words: "The last day is hidden from us, that every day may be observed by us." The noiseless approach of the last great Day is well illustrated by the old Greek proverb: "The feet of the avenging deities are shod with wool."

The final coming of Christ will be most unexpected and sudden; but it will also be most solemn in itself, and in its eternal issues, and every hint concerning it, and every allusion to it, through the whole scope of Scripture, makes it more and more impressive that we should constantly watch for it as possibly coming at any

instant. There is nothing asserted concerning his coming again with such strange emphasis as this sudden and unexpected manner in which it will startle, alarm, and utterly bewilder and terrify all who are not watching for it.

What good heed should be given to the solemn fact of revelation that it was the purpose to make it certain and impressive that the return again of our Lord was the greatest and most momentous event that now awaited the world. As it will be to consummate the glorious work of redemption, we may be certain that it fills the heart of that Coming One who for this redemption became incarnate, sunk his infinite riches into strange poverty, lived in humiliation, endured shame and sorrow, and bled amid the agonies of Golgotha. Oh how it must fill his soul, with the prospect of returning again to finish that work and open the way for its everlasting issues! What a coming will it be in itself, in its results, and in the impression it must make upon the whole waiting, watching universe! What inexpressible meaning there is in it that among the closing verses of God's great revelation to the world we have: "Behold, I come quickly"—"He which testifieth these things, said, *Surely* I come quickly!"

Worthy of the most profound reflection are the words of Dean Trench: "This announcement of the speedy coming of the Lord, the ever-recurring key-note of this book, is sometimes used as a word of fear for those who are abusing the Master's absence—wasting his goods and ill-treating their fellow servants, careless and secure as those for whom no day of reckoning should ever arrive; but sometimes a word of infinite comfort for those with difficulty and painfulness holding their ground;—He that should bring the long contest to an end; who should at once turn the scale, and forever, in favor of righteousness and truth, is ever at the door."

### PRECURSORY MOVEMENTS.

Supposing the period, fixed in the infinitely wise counsels of Deity, for the final coming of our Lord to finish the work of redemption to have arrived, what, so far as God has revealed them, will be the initiatory events? They are all unknown, and unknowable, except as they have been revealed on the sacred pages; and we must therefore adhere strictly to what we can discover there. Imagination, conjecture, fancy must not decide us on any point. The Holy Ghost understood perfectly what

it was suitable for us to know, and revealed accordingly, so that his teachings alone are that with which we are concerned. What does he tell us concerning the premonitory indications of our Lord's return?

Certainly the events of the world grow very solemn, as he draws nigh. Creation is getting ready for his manifestation as he draws nearer and nearer. Though it is not so asserted by the Spirit, yet the analogy of all else that we do know with certainty would lead us to expect that, at the approaching moment, the world stands in awful silence, as nature stands in mute expectation before the bursting out of the gathering tempest. We may not go any farther in the investigation of the scenes preliminary to the advent of our returning Lord; but very solemn and impressive are the revealings of the Spirit which we have in Scripture, and which we have simply to repeat. It is, by them, made plain that there will be intense and solemn excitement among the tribes of mankind, in all the realms of nature, and even through the ranks of the heavenly hosts.

Among other things it is revealed that sudden and inevitable destruction will come upon all scorners, and they shall not escape; that "fearful signs" in heaven and on earth will announce the appearance of the Judge of the world as at hand. The whole creation will be conscious of inutterable woe. The ungodly will be filled with terror and despair; even the righteous will fear, and anxiously look after those things which are coming on the earth, and the whole creation shall groan and travail with pain: "On the earth there shall be distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things that are coming on the earth." But "the Spirit and the Bride say, Come. . . . . Even so, come, Lord Jesus." "The sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken; and then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

Then "the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of

God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord." "The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." In most august vision did the New Testament seer gaze upon the sublime developments of that great Day. Before his entranced vision did the preparatory scenes become more and more sublime; and that, too, even though the succession of the particular events of the future cannot be fully distinguished from each other, or placed in the exact order in which they occurred. Indeed, it is not probable that such order will be observed in their ultimate fulfillment. They will most likely be simultaneous. The appearance of the Lord at his final coming, the resurrection of the dead, the change of those that are alive and remain, the renovation of the earth, the Judgment, the sentence and its fulfillment, are all events belonging to an indescribably solemn and holy hour, which will comprehend in itself the happiness and misery of all eternity.

But all premonitory events having occurred, and all things being ready, then comes the decisive moment of His arriving, and in an instant, unexpectedly at last, as the Scriptures assert, and death-bed experiences verify, he comes in all his glory. The Scriptures are very plain and very emphatic about the solemn events which will then be witnessed. Mankind will stand in awe; all nature will be convulsed as if filled with unutterable terror; even the heavens shall be darkened with omens of dread convulsions. It is more than probable that all shall stand in silent awe, as the ominous stillness precedes the breaking out of the fearful hurricane; and then will come the crash of the whole universe, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye,—He has come! Heaven and earth pass away. The angels, sweeping through the world on lightning wings, proclaim to all creatures that the glorified Lord has come again.

### DESIGN OF HIS COMING AGAIN.

The Scriptures leave us very little doubt as to what will be the leading purposes of that second coming of our Lord. It will be that, at the end of the world, he may close the career of his Church, and bring in everlasting righteousness. The pre-

dictions concerning this are very full and very solemn. More momentous words were never uttered; we should lay them deeply to heart. Among them we find such words as these: "For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air." How sublimely will thus be accomplished the engagement of the last supper in the upper room in Jerusalem: "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."

This last will undoubtedly be the grand second coming of Christ for which all previous comings had been preparing, and in which they will all culminate. He will then come to the great Judgment of all the quick and the dead. He will come in great glory to the marriage supper of the Lamb—for until then it will be only the day of his espousals. Then will be the marriage so often celebrated in the sacred pages, as when the enraptured prophet cried: "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him; for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her it was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white; for the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage-supper of the Lamb." This marriage of the Lamb is the splendid emblem by which the covenant and spiritual union between Christ and his Church is so often presented in Holy Scripture. This is done because whatever power of unchanging love, whatever pledge of truth and faithfulness, whatever obligation of provision and protection is contained in the idea of holy marriage, are all realized to believers in Him who, as the husband is head of the wife, is in a higher sense "Head over all things to the Church."

The great purposes of his coming again may easily be summed up. He will come in great glory to receive from the Father his approbation of his redeeming work, and its acceptance before the whole universe; to complete the salvation of all the elect; to pronounce sentence upon the quick and the dead; to be glorified in those who shall have been ransomed from death and hell; to

be admired in all those who believe; to bring to light the hidden things of darkness; to reign gloriously for evermore over the kingdom which he shall have purchased by his own blood most precious; to destroy death and everything that might lead to death of either body or soul; to be seen by every eye, and adored by every righteous heart in the universe.

As it is concerning the great purposes of his coming, so also have we some general intimations of the manner of his appearing. He will come in the clouds. He will be surrounded by angels, and by the glory of his Father—he will come in his own glory, more bright and dazzling than on the mount of Transfiguration, in flaming fire that will fill his enemies with terror, and his friends with holy awe; in power and great glory, before which all opposers shall shrink away in shame and confusion of face! He will come again as he went up with that sublimity which the disciples beheld on the Mount of Olives--accompanied by angels innumerable. He will come suddenly, when not expected, as a thief in the night—like a flash of lighting coming in an instant.

Then all the affairs of time shall be filled up in getting ready for the solemn events that are to follow. All the affairs of nations, of churches, of families, of individuals, of grace, of providence, of human powers, of inventions, of institutions, of history: all the affairs of this world—and, so far as we know, of all worlds—are so directed as to prepare the way for the coming of our Lord. Of this we are made most certain, as we have his own positive assurance; for he asserted, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth," and on this assurance is built the confidence which his followers may have in going out to win the world to him, and to prepare it for receiving him whenever he shall return.

The whole scheme of redemption looks forward to Christ's coming again and is guided with reference thereto. Followers are to be gained over to his cause that they may be ready to glorify him at his appearing. Such are some of the things which, we are assured, will precede his glorious return. Many others are also on record. Among them, none is made more emphatic than its suddenness. It is often repeated, and many figures are used to make it the more impressive.

Another element of the preparations which it is foretold will make ready for our Lord's appearing again will be the gathering of all men of all generations and all lands, on which so much stress is laid. "The Son of man shall come in his glory, and

all the holy angels with him; then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory. *And before him shall be gathered all nations.*" In another place the warning is: "*For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ.*" In still another place it is: "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God." This awful truth, that all the world shall be witnesses of our Lord's advent and partakers in its eventful scenes, is made extremely emphatic in the solemn words: "And every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him."

Still another purpose of that glorious coming of the Son of man will be that he may take the supreme throne over the whole universe of creatures and reign to all eternity. This is made very clear and positive: "Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the Lord of hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously." Elsewhere it is predicted: "And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." Still again is the prediction: "And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever."

Great stress is also placed upon every event preparatory to the advent of the omnipotent and everlasting King as he shall take the throne. How awful must be that appearance of which we read: "He shall come in the glory of his Father,"—"in his own glory, and all the holy angels with him"—"in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God"—in "the sign of the Son of man in heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory;"—in all these and many other revealings of the Holy Scriptures, it is made most certain and emphatic that the steps of our coming Lord shall be marked with the utmost sublimity and awe.

From all these predictions, and many others which we might easily cite, it is manifest that this great day of Christ's appearing will be the Day of days. It will be the great day of decision for all the descendants of Adam—a day of woe or of rapture for all our race. The closing scenes will then be witnessed which shall be preparatory to the everlasting ages. We, readers and

writer, shall all be witnesses and participants of those preparatory events. We shall be participants, and, glory be to our God of all grace, we may be ready for them! We may be so prepared that, when it shall no longer be, "*The Bridegroom cometh!*" but "*The Bridegroom has come!*" it shall be to us the most joyous news that our ears ever heard.

### SCENES OF THE GREAT DAY.

All the preparatory comings of the Son of man having been witnessed throughout the lapse of the ages, and all the immediate preparations having been made just before his appearing, then the great Day fixed in the eternal counsels of the Deity will dawn, the climax come, and the consummation of our Lord's return be witnessed in all the regions of the universe. This is the one momentous event, preparations for which had been going on throughout all the centuries. All heaven and earth, all men and angels, all principalities and powers, had been getting ready for it; and now he is to appear in all his glory. It is the Day of all days—the culminating point of time; and what manifestations of Deity, what revelations of the mysteries of centuries, what momentous events for all creatures, in all regions of space, and all ages to come, will, without any doubt, be disclosed in it! "Come, Lord Jesus," had been the cry of the faithful through many a weary period, and now it is to be answered in a revelation of glory of which no creature had ever dreamed.

Blessed be God that he has not left us in utter ignorance of what some of its wondrous scenes are to be! He has lifted the veil, at least in part, from some of the momentous scenes which are then to transpire, and we are permitted, even now, to behold, wonder, and adore at what is coming. Though, doubtless, but few comparatively of the momentous scenes of that day have been revealed to us, yet in themselves and in their own grandeur they are wonderful, and in their position as parts of the divine plans they are sublime. Even though it may be so briefly as if they were a mere catalogue, we must glance at a few of them. When that great Day arrives, then shall sin be laid prostrate in the dust, as an enemy conquered, and to be dreaded no more; Satan shall be punished, being bound by fetters in the regions of darkness and woe; death shall be conquered, changed, and finally banished from all the habitations of men; the countless multitude who shall have been ransomed by the blood of the Lamb shall all be gathered home; the ruined race of mankind shall be rescued, emancipated, and

glorified as participants of the very glory bestowed on the Son of man himself; the last seal upon the mysterious roll of Providence shall be broken, and the pages opened to the gaze of the followers of the Lamb; Messiah, promised from remotest ages, shall be crowned as supreme and everlasting King of men and angels; the hidden purposes of Jehovah, inscrutable though they have been to all the generations of the past, shall all be opened, and beheld in their infinite magnificence; the mysteries of redemption too high and dazzlingly bright for the comprehension of human intelligence shall be opened, and read in the milder light of the sardine throne; the elect shall be gathered into that celestial temple from which they shall go no more out; the sublime curiosity of the angels, desiring to look into the glad tidings communicated by the Holy Ghost, shall be gratified by the sight of celestial wonders which even the prophets declaring them did not understand; angels and cherubim, though evermore standing near to the Great White Throne, shall behold new marvels breaking out from the light of the glory of God which created eye could never before endure; and above all, and as the sum of all, Immanuel, who ascending, by the cross, "far above all principality and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named," in the highest and holiest and most sublime sense, "shall see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied."

These, and such as these, are scenes of the great Day of his coming which will be witnessed by saints and angels. They will be seen by every one of us whose name shall be found written in the Lamb's book of life. They will be the realities of that great Day of the Lord, towards which all creatures in the universe are looking forward. We may not drop any one of them from the list of the events which we are taught to expect on that momentous day when our Lord shall come again to his waiting Church. We may pass them over in review, one after another, and we shall still find that they have all been ordained or predicted as accompaniments of the return to his people of Him who had long been absent preparing a place for their endless habitation. No wonder that at the beginning of the revelation there should sound out to all creatures the earnest call, "*Behold, he cometh!*" "*Behold, he cometh with clouds!*" Coming in company with such grand events as these, it is no wonder that holy curiosity should prompt the angels to look into such celestial glories! No wonder they are represented as gazing with earnest eyes upon the mercy-seat, the great marvels of which their divine Lord was coming from the

realms of glory to open and make plain to the highest and holiest of creatures. How they, as well as all other creatures, would thrill with amazement and joy, as mystery after mystery would be unfolded by the Lion of the tribe of Judah, who had come to open the sealed book of Providence.

No wonder if all creatures should stand adoring as scene after scene of that day of his glorious coming shall be made to pass before them! What shall we say now as we look forward to them, guided by the sure word of prophecy? Oh, grandest thought of mortal!—most exalted intellect of archangel!—most rapturous imagination of the ransomed multitude!—how can all united give us any adequate conception of the amazing glory of that Day when our majestic King shall come to be glorified in his saints, and admired in all them that believe! Blessed be the name of our celestial Lord, that day is approaching! He is coming! He is coming, ye people of God! He is coming, ye toiling, striving watchers! He is coming, and will very soon appear, ye patient ones who have waited so long!

### RESULTS OF THAT DAY.

Just as all the ages which went before were filled with preparation for his coming, so all the ages which follow after the advent of our Lord will be the carrying out of the sublime issues of which that great Day will be the beginning. It will be the dividing-point between the glories coming down from an eternity past and those sweeping onward into the eternal ages to come. Sublime changes will be made in the administration of the affairs of the world. As to our Lord, he will then take the throne on which, with the Father, he will reign evermore in supreme power. Then will a peculiar homage of the universe be rendered him, involving a glory which will never end. Every seal of the divine decrees will be broken, every mystery made plain, and every line of prophecy shall be fulfilled in the infinite, supreme, and all-comprehending glory of the Redeemer of men.

As to the saints of the Lord, all their sin shall be over for ever, all their suffering gone, and all their evils of every kind brought to an end. They shall then be fully released from their cruel and degrading slavery to sin and Satan, their subjection to death, and their thraldom to all that is low and vile. Free!—the freedom of the Lord shall then be their exaltation and their immortal bliss. Ransomed by the blood of Christ from death and hell, they shall enter upon an immortal career of liberty and blessedness. As conquerors, and more than conquerors, through Him that loved

them, they shall never more be in slavery to their lusts, or to any foe that would oppress or degrade. Washed from all their sins in the blood of Immanuel, purified, exalted, redeemed, they shall never be suffered to fall from the path of "glory and honor and immortality." Such honor will then be theirs as no other creatures ever knew—even the honor described by their Lord himself: "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people." Coming from the lips of their loving Lord himself, who could imagine or ask for any more? Marvelous shall then be their destiny of glory and bliss, and unspeakable the honor by which they shall be crowned, as through the ranks of the blessed shall spread the wonder: "What are these which are arrayed in white robes, and whence came they?" and the answer shall come back from the throne to their immortal honor: "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." And then, more amazing still is the destiny of bliss which is laid open before them—before *them*, most exalted of the rapturous multitude who stand before the King of kings and Lord of lords!—"Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat."

Thus shall his ransomed followers be honored by the glorified Lord, on that great Day of his coming. Their names shall be proclaimed as trophies of his mediatorial achievements amid the glorified assembly—for to each of them our Lord has engaged: "I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels." And they shall be crowned with glory, and honor, and immortality. Every splendid emblem is used by which to describe the glories which shall thenceforth be imparted to them. In splendid vision it is revealed: "I saw four-and-twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold." Even though we may not be able to interpret the meaning of all amid this blaze of glory awaiting the ransomed on that Day when their Lord shall appear again, yet can we see enough of it to be filled with wonder and gratitude at the thought of what we shall be. Though the promises may create but an indistinct haze, yet even that, awakening the thought of the saints taking their place as pillars in the heavenly temple, of their wandering amid the the groves of the heavenly paradise, and by the rivers

of pleasure in the heavenly city, and wearing the white robes of purity and joy,—all this must fill the soul with rapturous expectation.

On that glorious Day the ransomed of the Lord shall enter into, as their eternal residence, the regions of the blessed, where sorrow will never be known, and sin never curse, and tears never flow. They shall be admitted to the effulgence of the light of the glory of God, into which no darkness of any night shall ever be permitted to intrude, and where no glare of brightness shall ever dazzle! On that great Day shall be realized to the full the engagement our Lord made with his disciples on the night before he left them for a long season: "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also." He would come again to them, and then they would never more be separated; never again would he leave his Church. Their union, when he would come again, would be sealed by an everlasting covenant, well ordered and sure; and the endless ages, as they would roll on, would only cement them into dearer, closer, and more inseparable bond for ever. As was confidently asserted by the blessed Apostle of the Gentiles, so might it be repeated by all the true followers of the Lord on that great Day when he would return to them in his glory: "In all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Oh, blessed coming of our Lord! It will be the commencement of an everlasting union. Nothing in the wide universe can ever again separate the Lord from those precious saints whom he purchased with his own blood! Neither length of ages, nor cunning of enemies, nor force of powers massed together, ever can weaken the bonds which will then and for evermore bind together the Son of God and those beloved followers whom he will receive into everlasting habitations. That Day of marvelous bliss from which all the ransomed of the Lord shall date their everlasting blessedness!—the Day towards which all the plans of redemption looked intently forward from the sad hour when the race was first banished out of Eden, and from which the rivers of sacred pleasure shall flow on and on while immortality endures! The Lord hasten it in his own time!

ASCEND THE WATCH-TOWER.

"Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him." This is the stirring call by which the sublime events of the last great Day are to be heralded; well may it also be the cry with which they close. "He cometh!" Up! to the watch-tower to catch the first glimpse of his appearing! Up! in each glorious movement of the predicted day the call is reiterated. Higher! He is at hand! At the instant of his departure from earth the assurance was given, "He shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven," and in all the ages since, every eye of the faithful has been turned upward for his first appearing. It must be now very near: up, ye true and loving hearts, to obtain the first view of him! With multitudes of others you have been appealing to his loving heart, "How long, O Lord, how long?" Your prayer is on the eve of fulfillment. Up, up, to obtain the first ecstatic view! The world is moving at his appearing, and the instant at hand when "every eye shall see him." Up, that he may be glorified, as the world beholds your irrepressible love! Up, the time is—it must be —at hand! He is coming!—ye blood-bought men on earth, ye saints in glory, ye bright angels on ten thousand sparkling wings, ye cherubs flaming in light around the throne, awake to more rapturous joys! He is coming, and the greatest and grandest event of the universe is at hand!

Ascend on high and watch, for, "Behold, he cometh!" As a devout author has expressed the joyous thought: "Six thousand years this world has rolled on, getting hoary with age and wrinkled with sins and sorrows. A waiting Church sees the long-drawn shadows announcing, 'The Lord is at hand.' Stand oftentimes on the watch-tower to catch the first streak of that coming brightness, the first murmur of those chariot-wheels. The world is now in preparation. It is rocking on its worn-out axle. There are voices on every side proclaiming, He cometh! He cometh!" He is at the door! He is knocking with nail-pierced hands! "He stands at the door, with his wounds open, his blood streaming, and his garments dyed with blood. What a sight—what a wondrous sight, on that great Day, in the midst of the radiant throne, of glorious cherubim, and ransomed men, shall be seen: "A Lamb as it had been slain!" Watch, therefore, most earnestly, for the Lord is coming in power and great glory. Gaze afar, over the wide seas of time and over the fields of providence; and behold the Heaven-erected Beacon of the ages,

that you may catch the first glimpse of the Son of man as he draws near. Watch each sign of his appearing.

But watching is not all; for we are also to pray and prepare. We must be men of prayer as the hour of our Lord's appearing draws nigh. The days are becoming fewer—they should therefore be the more diligently improved. As the time of his coming draws nigher, more impressive grows the assurance, "*Blessed is he that watcheth.*" This is to be awake and in earnest. It is to have the communication ever open between the soul and its God. It is to have the aspect ever upward and ever onward. It is to have Christ ever real to us, and the Holy Spirit ever present. It is to rejoice with a sincere and thankful joy in every victory won for Christ in the world or in a soul. It is to use the world as a trust, and not as a possession. It is to have the affection set on things above, and not on things on the earth; to have our conversation, our citizenship, already in heaven; to have our very life, the life that is most dear and most real and most precious to us, hidden even now with Christ in God. So, when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with him in glory.

### BE READY!

Most appropriately, we may draw to a close these earnest words concerning the return of our Lord by his own most solemn admonition: "Be ye therefore ready also; for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not." Be ready! is the earnest call which comes to us from the lips of our loving Lord, and from every page of his inspired Word; from earth and heaven, from time and eternity. Be ready! is the admonition from every ray of the Beacon of the ages; from the warning that the coming of our glorious Lord is at hand, and from the fathomless love of our blessed Redeemer who will soon take us to himself, to be separated from us no more. There can scarcely be a question but that the great ultimate design of all these messages to the churches, with their words of practical wisdom, their varied admonitions, and their earnest calls, was to summon men to the solemn work of preparing to meet that Judge who was so soon to summon them before him. As if, just before closing the sacred volume, he would gather up all into one final appeal, whose accents of warning would ever ring in their ears, with the reiterated call, Be ready! be ready! This was the great burden of the messages—the signal of the Beacon to be seen by every eye, of every age. How this thought brings the message home! Behold the heavenly Watcher; he sees

your condition. The attributes of the great King; they are all interested. Hear the words of rebuke; they are to rescue from eternal death. The approvals; they would lead to glory and immortality. The warnings and promises; they are the motives which God himself is using. The earnest call, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches;" they are Heaven's own final words.

All are designed to move us to the solemn work of getting ready. How impressive then is the summons that comes to every soul: Awake, the Lord is coming; his chariot-wheels may be heard! He is coming: this is the only absolutely certain event in the kingdom. It will not be long until he appears, looked at in any light the event may be. He is coming: let us bend down to it every power of our mind. Oh that we could, or would, realize the deeply-solemn fact!

May preparation for this coming be the one great business of all our lives! To get ready for it is the most solemn of all motives that could be urged upon a mortal man. All our present cares, and purposes, and efforts should centre on this. The greatest Day of the world will be this: what does the certainty of its coming demand of us now? If we have prepared for this, what need we dread? if it has been neglected, for what can we hope? Our only safety is in being ready—ready every day, every hour. Ready for Christ's coming again: it is wisdom infinitely higher than that of insuring the richest treasures against the flames. It is putting on the wedding garment, which will open the door to the marriage of the Lamb. If ready, then there will be no awful surprise when the great Day shall come. Then the cry, "Behold, he cometh!" will be the rapture of the soul. But, if not ready, it will be a cry of terror, of woe, and of endless misery.

It was a blessed sight, a sound never to be forgotten, as the aged saint, admonished that his last hour on earth had come, with his expiring strength arose and said sweetly: "I shall neither eat nor drink until I go home." And he did not; for in a few minutes he was at home with his Lord for ever. So will it be with every ready, waiting saint, when his Lord appears. When that last day will be, is now hidden from the ken of every creature; but, if ready, no matter—all is well, for it will only be the moment of passing into the everlasting rest—the moment for the full realization of the thrilling benediction, "*Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb.*"

# TOPICAL INDEX.


## A.

Ahab, repentance of, 304.
Ahaziah, fall and suffering of, 306; punishment of, for his mother's crimes, 306.
Alexander, Archibald, on Apocalypse, 611.
Alexander the Great at Ephesus, 161.
Alford on Christ's coming, 637.
All-seeing eye of God, 496.
Amen of Christ's kingdom, 483.
Anatolia selected by Providence, 9.
Angels, important symbol, 104; of the churches, various views on, 105; real apostles, 106; genius of the churches, 107; celestial angels, 107; deputies of the churches, 108; an officer taken from the synagogue, 108; moderators of presbyteries, 109; diocesan bishops, 109; true meaning of, 112; first process of interpretation, 112; the ministry in aggregate, 113; as one mystical person, 114; the spiritual authority, 114; second process of interpretation, 115; precise meaning, 115; full description, 117; third process of interpretation, 118; whole argument, 119; appropriate description of church authority, 119; "before his," 365; gazing at mercy-seat, 635.
Antinomians, of the early Church, 178; errors of, 274; the first heresy of early Church, 275; always appearing, 275; lewdness of church of Thyatira, 303; root of, 500; abominable elements of, 318; gross heresies of, 516; love turned into lust, 517; masterpiece of devil, 517; believe that sin is impossible to believers, 518; first and worst heresy, 518; always appearing, 518; always ready for evil, 518; its power, 518; never shows true colors, 518.
Antipas, who and what, 262; burnt in a cage, 263; honor of divine notice, 263; witness he bore, 263; who was he? 535.
"Ape of God," the devil the, 500.
Apocalypse acknowledged in second century, 352.
Apollo, god of Thyatira, 246.
Appeals of God to sinners, 456.
Approvals, before rebukes, 521.
Aquila and Priscilla at Ephesus, 172.
Artificial lake in Pergamos, 245.
Arundell, on mountains at Sardis, 340; on desolation of Sardis, 350.
Asia Minor, suited for planting the gospel, 9; country described, 15, 16; valleys, plains, and table-lands, 18; climate, 21; productions, forests and mines, 22; cities, 24; imaginary picture of, 26; original population of, 27; like Palestine, 29; why chosen for planting the gospel, 29; coasts indented by bays, 30; idolatry concentrated in, 30; history of, 32; greatest events of antiquity in, 34; great men in, 36; celebrated objects in, 36; Providence fitted it for the gospel, 38; original religious state of, 42; all covered by idolatry, 44; planting gospel in, greatest work of, 49; church's rapid growth in, 49; gospel's rapid growth in, 58; bird's-eye view of, 130; best place for testing gospel, 133.
Asian Meadows, Valley of, Homer's, 421.
Associates, contamination of evil, 265.
Asylum, right of, prolific source of evil, 158, 160.
Asylums, none in old paganism, 342.
Attalus, III., last and worst of the line, 248; great importance of line of, 248.
Attalus Philadelphus, 380.
Attention, mortal, summoned, 610; all abruptness at every point, 626.
Attribute of Christ in message to Ephesus, 179.
*Ayasalook*, old Ephesus, 149, 150, 151; from John, 171; wretched hovels, 191.

## B.

Baal-Peor, idolatrous feast of, 516.
Bacchus, deity of Philadelphia, 383; description of, 383; debasing influence of his worship, 384.
Backsliding, in secret at first, 506; always gradual, 506; danger of, 567.
Bajazet, the Mussulman conqueror, 381.
Balaam, strange character, 265; whence his power, 266; learned from old traditions, 266; where he came from, 266; celebrated soothsayer, 266; an able man, 267; not permitted to curse, 267; his diabolic scheme, 268; type of seducers, 268; shameful death of, 268; Baal-Peor, the impostor, 268; scenes of his history, 272; the necromancer, 515; covetousness of, 515; diabolic plot, 515; doctrine of, 516.
Balaamites, in Pergamos, 259–263.
Balak, who and what, 266; watching Israel, 267; in dilemma, 267.
Barnes, on danger of wealth, 443; on punishment of lewdness, 575.
Beacon, seven churches set up as a, 20;

on the shores, 123; over the stormy waves, 130; messages, chief design of 129, 130; first contact of the gospel was the, 131; special providence in providing, 134; principles leading up to, 135; adapted to immutability of God and man, 135; made conspicuous, 145; lessons of, 141; of Smyrna, 238; Laodicea in, 469; in God's omniscience, 494; on worldliness, 513; held up, 618; Sardis in, 366; Philadelphia in, 413.
Beatific vision, raptures of, 279.
Bed of torment corresponds with bed of fornication, 306.
Beginning of creation, Christ the, 436.
Belief and practice always alike, 502.
Bible, why try to destroy, 615.
Bishops, diocesan, the angels of churches not, 109, 110, 119.
Blakesley, Dean, on Pergamos, 250.
Blasphemy of Jews, 213, 214.
Bliss, heavenly, increased by contact, 559; dreams of, in youth, 196.
Blunt, on God knowing, 456.
Boatmen carrying gospel up to Philadelphia, 387.
Book of remembrance, erasing from, 364, 495.
Bread, the heavenly, 279.
Brevity of account of contact with paganism, 140.
Bribe, Balak offering a, 267.
Bridegroom, coming of the, 653.
Brotherly love, strong words about, 535; chief of all graces, 536.
Burden, two meanings of, 312; a threatened judgment, 312; obligation to law, 312; on Thyatira, 315.
Buying only from God, 447.

## C.

Calamities, on church of Smyrna, 225, 227; God overrules, to his people, 227.
Calendar reformed, 334.
Calls of God, 456.
Candlesticks, removal of, 566, 567; removed and not extinguished, 186, 187; the seven, 113; God in the, 479.
Canon of Bible, first, 352, 430.
Celerity of Christ as King, 481.
Censures on all the churches save two, 499.
Central points, all else around, 103; list of, in messages, 103; meaning of, 174; to Ephesus, 174; to Thyatira, 298; to Sardis, 351; to Philadelphia, 390; to Laodicea, 442.
Chandler on Laodicea, 450.
Charges, none against Smyrna and Philadelphia, 229.
Charity, first of graces, 536.
Chart, messages intended for a, 130.
Chastisements that would come, 362, of God, in love, 455.
Christ, Head in his churches, 180; grieved by want of love, 189; and the heart, 183; over every event, 208; opprobious names to, 214; Son of God, 294; opposition to, root of all heresy, 388; All-true, 435; Beginning of creation of God, 435, 436; All-in-all, 437, 609; qualifications as King, 481; omnipotence of, 481; drawing near to, 458; First and Last, 476; Beginning of creation, 476; knowledge of all, 310; King of truth, 552; our example, 554; go direct to, 555; Mediatorial King, 590; "for joy set before him," 599; Morning Star, 603, 607, 609.
Christianity, first effects on natural heart, 132; final dominion of, 321.
Christians, riches of, 212; opprobrious names to, 214; popular to be, 259.
Churches of Asia Minor, planted by leading apostles, 58; rapid growth, 57; condition when Apocalypse given, 57–60; love cooling in, 176; Christ in midst of, 180; Christ dearly loves the, 180; God knows all the, 494; work, specimen of, 210; God's army, 478; its future safe, 554.
Church life, all forms of, in the messages, 135.
Church work, fruit of the Spirit, 488.
Cities, of the seven churches, 24; located by circumstances, 372; gospel at first in the chief, 432.
Co-heirs, believers, with Christ, 212.
Coldness of heart, what do for, 184; contrasted with lukewarmness, 442.
Columns of Cybele's temple, 341, 342.
Colossians, conflict in planting their church, 433.
Cogamus, stream of Philadelphia, 379.
Comfort, God ready with, 212.
Coming of Christ, as a thief, 570; key of Apocalypse, 630, 630, 658; importance of, 630; most momentous, 631, 633; (1) at Pentecost, 633; (2) providential visitations, 634; (3) at death, 634; (4) at destruction of Jerusalem, 634; (5) in conversion of the world, 634; (6) in judgment, 635; six different events indicated, 635; what event precisely, 635; not any isolated event, 636; whole accumulated mass, 636; not one event, 637; totality of events, 637; connection with messages, 637; keynote of Revelation, 638; in triumph, 638; beginning, course, and end, 638; stages of, 640; footsteps of preparation for, 641; crisis of, 641; sublimities of crisis, 641; Church watching for, 642; announcements, 642; process of preparation, 642; glory of, 642; as thief in night, 642; time of, hidden, 643; suddenness of, 644; solemn, 646, 647; quickly, 647; precursory movements, 647, 648; designs of, 649; manner of, 651; day of days, 652; taking throne, 652; awful events at, 653, 654; glory of, 655.
Commendations, always before censure, 209; of church of Ephesus, 181; why need them, 183; of Thyatira, 296.

Communion of Christ and his people, 459.
Companions, evil, dangerous, 268; five warnings about, 502; evil of bad, 502.
Compassions, God's, in knocking, 457; of the messages, 101, 102.
Confession of his followers by Christ, 364, 594.
Conflicts, guidance for, 548.
Conqueror, crowned, 230; believer, in the end, 194.
Conquest and safety, 231.
Conscience, tortures of, 574; in Tiberius, 575; refuge of all errorists, 302.
Consideration, God's, for his people, 212.
Contact of Christianity with paganism, 626, 131.
Contamination of evil, 265, 502.
Contempt, shame and, 573.
Contest with last enemy, 319; with pagan seductions, 319.
Continuance in well-doing, 528.
Contrivances, evil of human, 623.
Conversion, joy of, 277; rapture of, 283.
Cooling of first love, 176; in the Church, 176; connected with beginning of errors, 177; resulting evils, 177.
Corruption to be shunned, 533.
Council of Ephesus, 164; robbers', 164.
Councils, ecclesiastical, in Asia Minor, 35.
Counsels (Chapter XIX.), 543; analyzed and classified, 543; together, a body of practical wisdom, 545; results of experience, 546; no mere theorizing, but practical, 546; from Father's heart, 546; aids in gospel work, 547; helps in saving others, 547; obey, whether understood or not, 547; best guide for us, 548; adapted to real conflicts, 548; to Thyatira, 314; to Philadelphia, 403.
Country of Asia Minor, 29.
Covetousness, greatest enemy of religion, 508.
Craven, Dr., on Rev. 2:18, 401; on good works, 311.
Creatures, God reigns through, 478.
Crisis in the Church, 621; of Sardis, 335; present one, 621.
Crœsus, Sardis in its glory under, 335; his sad downfall, 335; immense wealth of, 337; last days of, 338.
Crosby, on worldliness, 513.
Cross, enduring the, 559.
Crowds attracted by worship of Diana, 160.
Crown of life given, 225, 229; of life, of glory, of righteousness—diadem of beauty, 231; fitting for Smyrna, 231; take thy, 401; how hold fast, 402; victory of the saints, 404; only to poor, 414.
Curse, turned into blessing, 504; on impenitent terrible, 307.
Cybele, pillars of, 340; ruins of temple, 340, 341; the deity of Sardis, 343, 344.

D.

Danger of delay, 305.
Dark spots, 499; list of, 520.
Date of Apocalypse, and condition of Church then, *preface*.
David, Christ the true, 390; key of, 477.
Deadness, danger of spiritual, 366; origin of, 367.
Death, our Forerunner in, 208, 209; glory in, 283; beatific vision, 283; the last enemy, 319; spiritual, 356; the second, 232; of saint, 283.
Deceitfulness of sin, 565.
Defiance of devil and his angels, 227.
Degrees of promised bliss—(1) immortality, 585; (2) exemption from second death, 586; (3) inviolable friendship, 588; (4) ruling the nations, 589; (5) trophies of Christ, 592; (6) pillars in temple, 595; (7) seat on heavenly throne, 597.
Deities of the seven cities, 43.
Delay, sin and danger of, 305.
Demetrius the silversmith, speech of, 53.
Denizli, near Laodicea, 466, 467; utterly deserted, 468.
Depths of Satan, 317.
Devil, author of all persecutions, 205; cause of all its cruelties, 205; imprisoning his victims, 206; worshipped in Pergamos, 252; serpent the emblem of, 252; mimics God, 253; his throne in Pergamos, 253; the Wicked one, 258; outwitting, 317; world, flesh and, 363; apes God, 500.
Diana, trade in her shrines, 53; Ephesus her home, 154; filled all Ephesus, 155; crowds attracted by, 160; revenues from her worship, 159; attractions of her temple, 160; world's fair, assizes, games, market-day, worship, 161; temple, 191; site of, 191; temple at Sardis, 347.
Diocletian, worst persecutor, 207.
Dionysus, corrupt worship of, 333.
Discipline by God, 320.
Doctrine and practice go together, 502.
Doing, not feeling, 184.
Doing good, specimens of, 210; to each other, 210; God notices little acts of, 298.
Dominion, over nations by believers, 592, 593; is Christ's, 477.
Domitian, persecutions of, 398.
Doom, words of (Chapter XX.), 561–580.
Door, an open, 390; open the barred, 458; what bars, 458.
Dyeing, business of Philadelphia, 379.

E.

Earnestness that should be shown, 439; cause demands, 528; now sorely needed, 557; cry for, 559; life vain without, 560; Lord give me, 560; in religion, 618, 619, 623.
Ears to hear, 610.
"Earth and man," by Guyot, 424.
Earthquakes, peculiarity in Asia Minor, 31; in region of Philadelphia, 394; shaped the message to Philadelphia,

376; kept Philadelphia small, 376; influenced message to Philadelphia, 377; and religion of Philadelphia, 387; shaped whole message to Philadelphia, 391; open doors of, 391; worst of Asia Minor, 398.
Edwards, on God's knocking, 457.
Egotism of scientists, 310.
Elders, stars in God's right hand, 479.
Eleusinian mysteries, what, 343.
Emerson, on ruins of Sardis, 347; on ruined Laodicea, 451.
Encouragements to the persecuted, 226, 227.
Enemies, of Christ and truth, 239; good for a church, 469.
Enmity to Christ, deadly, 534.
Enthronement of believers, 601.
Enthusiasm, religion must have, 527, 528.
Ephesians, type of lewdness, 179; attitude of Christ towards, 129; commendations of its church, 181; patience of, 181; toil of, 181.
Ephesian church, crisis in, 186; punishment of, 187; Ephesus, downfall of, 189; present desolations, 189; doomed to ruin, 189; causes of its ruin, 189; ramble through its ruins, 189, 190; panorama of all its ruins, 192.
Ephesian letters, 158.
Ephesus, vile idolatry of, 44; first missionary field, rendezvous of all adventurers, 144; light of Asia, 144; ancient great renown, 144; metropolis of the gospel in its day, 144; Marseilles of the Ægean, 145; scenes in, 145; first greatness of, 144; gospel to pagans first there, 145; greatness at the first, 146; form, 147; memorable events, 147; name dear to Christians, 147; study of, 147; conspicuous of old, 147; outlines of its history, 148; great men and events, 148; scenes in, of old, 149; as it is now, 149; struggle with the sea, 149; ruins of, 152; its commerce, 152; trade with the interior, 153; influence on other lands, 153; right of asylum its bane, 153; worship of Diana, 153; centre of light and truth, 154; its marbles in modern buildings, 162; Seven Sleepers of, 163; Epistle to, 163; sacked by the Goths, 164, 262; two councils in, 164; utter waste of, 165; sea encroaching on, 165; silting up of its harbor, 165, 166; plundered, 166; filling up its harbor, 166; doomed, 166, 167; embodiment of idolatry, 167; planting of its church by Timothy and others, 172; many members in its church, 173; minister of its church, 173; blessed work at first, 173; memorable things in, 161; Alexander in, 161; last hours of John, 162.
Errors, spring from loss of first love, 177; noxious effects of, 367; in doctrine and practice go together, 502; corrupting in very nature, 502.
Eumenes, line of kings, 248; the Second, 248; beautifies Pergamos, 248.
Europe, gospel first preached in, 45, 291.
Evidences of religion stored away, 139; John as an evidence in Ephesus, 171.
Evil, avoid as Satan, 533; experimenting with, 318; speak plainly about, 532; fear none, 226; principles, analysis, 500.
Exaltation of Christ, 463.
Example, influence of Christian, 397.
Excuses of all errorists, 302.
Experience, with all classes, 136; ignoring all, 625.
Experiments, first, of Christianity with paganism, 131; dangerous, 315, 623.
Eyesalve, anoint with, 449.

## F.

Falsehood, of all idolatry, 309; corrupting, 502.
Farming, the one industry of Philadelphia, 378.
Farrar, Canon, on Roman calamities, 390.
Fault-finding, wretched, 524.
Fear no evil, 226.
Feast, God willing to, with sinners, 458.
Feasts of paganism, 270.
Feeling, not, but doing, 184.
Feelings, God notices our, 175.
Feet as fine brass, 481.
Fellowship, none, with sinners, 271; with unbelievers a sin, 264; of bad men in the church, 265.
Few, still cared for, 359; very precious to God, 359; always some, 367; in Sardis, 367; duty of the, 367; God's pledge to, 368; have the promise, 415.
Fidelity and reward, 229; of church of Pergamos, 262.
Figures, promises in, 582.
First love, careful of, 523; cooling of, 176.
Fisk, Pliny, on Thyatira, 288.
Flesh, depraving influence of, 514; indulging, without sin absurd, 318; enemy to the soul, 363.
Footsteps of Christ, events of the ages the, 639.
Forbearance, God's wonderful, 458.
Fornication, matter of indifference, 269; awful evil of paganism, 270; impure women in the temples, 271; and idol meats, 270.
Foundations of the Church in blood, 535; efforts to destroy, 615.
Four, the number, 100.
Freedom while God still rules, 489.
Friendship inviolable, 588.
Fruits of the Spirit, 521; list of, 522; embodied in one Christian, 522.
Future events, why all known, 489.

## G.

Games, rewards in, 230.
General assembly of the ransomed, 594.
Germs, each word a germ of thought, 102; of church life alone given, 137.

Gerusia, 342, 347.
Gift, grant a throne, 461; salvation all a, 556.
Gifts, to be improved, 524.
Given up of God, 568.
Glory to be revealed, 278; of saints as trophies, 595.
Gods, temples to all the, Nicephorum, 251.
Gold tried in the fire, 448.
Golden milestone in Rome, 26.
Golden sands of Sardis, 337.
Good works, specimens, 210; God notices minute, 298; five benefits of, 487.
Grace, grow in, 540; specimen of, 541; under, and not law, 313, 501.
Gradation in elements of each message, 554.
Grand Monarque, Louis XIV., 512.
Gray, death of Dr., 660.
Great events in Asia Minor, 34.
Great men of Asia Minor, 36.
Great white throne, ransomed around, 594.
Greece, identified with Asia Minor, 32.
Greek Church, ignorance in, 413.
Growth in grace, 541.
Guide for all church life, 140.
Guyot, Prof., 424.
Gygæan lake at Sardis, 346.

## H.

Half-heartedness, bane of the Church, 528, 557.
Hall, Robert, on omniscience of God, 494.
Halyattes mausoleum at Sardis, 346.
Harlot, Jezebel forerunner of the great, 303.
Hartley, on columns of Cybele's temple, 341.
Hatred, natural, of the gospel, 211; of sin 502.
Head of all things, Christ the, 437.
Heart, Christ knows it all, 183; God the whole or none, 563.
Heaven, the beautiful, 409.
Help, God gives, 363.
Helping each other, 210.
Heresy, root of all opposition to God, 388; generally perverted truth, 501.
Hermus, river at Sardis, 346; 373, 374; trip up, 386; and Meander, 421.
Hodge, on Paul at Ephesus, 170.
Holiness, of Christ's Kingdom, 483.
Holy and true, Christ the, 388.
Holy One of Israel, 389.
Holy Spirit, Seven Spirits of God, 353; appropriate to Sardis, 353; in Christ's hands, 353; messages by, 613.
Homer, was deified, 204; born in Smyrna, 204; places claiming his birth, 204; influence on world's literature, 35.
Holy Theologian, John the, 413; church of the, 413.
Hour of temptation for Philadelphia, 400.
Human agency, appointed for conversion of the world, 526; needs the Spirit, 526.
Humbling the proud, 572.
Humility for leaving first love, 184; importance, from place in the Beacon, 529; God exalts, 530.
Hurt not by second death, 587.
Hypocrites in Ephesus, 182.
Hypocrisy, of Jews, 214; in Thyatira, 309.

## I.

Idolatry, embodied in Ephesus, 167; temples of all gods in Pergamos, 253; and lewdness, 274.
Idol meats, sin of eating, 271.
Immorality, greatest heresy of early Church, 179; perversion of true love, 179; of Pergamos, 253; sin of the early Church, 514; Pergamos essentially, 514; of paganism, 274.
Impenitent, curse on the, 307.
Imprisonment, persecution by, 206.
Improvements in theology, 624; dangerous, 315.
Impurity and heresy always go together, 502.
Inangural of ascending King, 475, 477.
Indifference, how to be met, 616, 618, 659; none in God to us, 213; awful sin, 439; torrent of evils, 519.
Infection of lasciviousness, 514.
Ingratitude, horrible, 524.
Inspiration proved by all-prevalent order, 35.
Intolerance of evil, 532.

## J.

Jehu, ferocity of, 307.
Jerusalem, the New, 408; metropolis of heaven, 408; horrors of its destruction, 565.
Jesus of Nazareth sneered at, 389.
Jews, blasphemy of, 213; always oppose the gospel, 213; many in Smyrna, 213; hypocrisy of, 214; synagogue of Satan, 214; worst of persecutors, 216; colony in Philadelphia, 381; carrying gospel to Philadelphia, 387; constant hostility to Christ, 388; humbled to believers, 396, 397.
Jezebel, three opinions about, 299; first opinion—wife of bishop, 299; objections to this, 299; second opinion—a certain sibyl, 300; objections to this, 300; third opinion—real Jezebel of the Jews, 300, 301; symbol of seduction, 301; forerunner of the great Harlot, 303; fearful punishment of, 306, 307; the unclean priestess, 514; depraving influence of, 515; punishment of, 574.
John, work of, in Asia Minor, 76; sketch, 79; last days in Ephesus, 162; work in Ephesus, 171; as an example, 171; sufferings for cause of Christ, 171; named "Ayasalnk," 171; in Philadelphia, 386; his "Love one another," 413.

Joy of conversion, 278, 283.
Judaism ended, 131.
Judgment, saints in the, 593; awfulness of, 649; scenes of the, 643; awful events of, 653.

K.

Key of David, 388, 390; supreme authority, 477; of death with Christ, 475.
Key-note, "Behold He Cometh," 638.
King, Christ the true, 390.
King of kings (Chapter XV.), 472, 591.
Kingdom, Christ's spiritual, 481, 482; God rules all, 489, 490.
Knocking of God's love, 455, 457.
Knowledge, Christ's, of all our interests, 310; God's, of the churches, 493.

L.

Laodicea, planting of its church, 48, 417; the wretched one, 417; message to, 419; *Eski-Hissar*—Old Castle, 419; alone in not being praised, 419; indelible brand upon, 419; no seducers in, 420; location of, 421; lines of merchandise through, 421; site of, 422; great local advantages, 422, 424; great money centre of the land, 423; mountains around it, 423; its many advantages, 424; the city then, 424; dense population about it, 425; market for wool, 425; tanning a leading industry, 425; dyeing a leading industry, 425; money market its leading business feature, 425; exchange of Asia, 426; its temple going up as that of Jerusalem going down, 426; ruins seen at 426; towns around it, 426; rich and proud, 427; worldliness of, 427; wretched moral condition, 427; brutal amusements, 427; Anthony and Cleopatra, 428; Philip crucified at, 428; distinguished for three things, 429; awful fall of, 429; planting of church in, 432; title of Christ in message to, 433; title of Son of man, 433; three titles by three expressions (Rev. 3:7), 434; the Amen, 434; church rebuked, 438; central point of message, 442; most severely censured, 443; the message adapted to the present time, 443; warning to, 450; parks all around, 450; grottoes under, 451; opening to hell, 451; Christianity utterly gone, 451; threatening against, fulfilled, 451; desolation of, 451; ruins of, 452; overcoming of, 452; no earnestness to make any enemies, 452; the city now, 465; now called *Ladik*, also *Eski-Hissar*, "Old Castle," 466; "wilderness of desolation," 466, 467; warning of, 469.
Lasciviousness, infliction of, 514; fathomless, 514.
Law, not, but grace, 500; freedom from the, 616.
Lessons of the Beacon, 141.
Let alone of God, 568.
Lethargy creeping over a church, 448.
Lewdness, leads to all evils, 138; great sin of early Church, 178; three forms of worship, 171; and idolatry, 274; first crime of early Church, 274, 302; a religious system, 303; awful punishments of, 309, 575; punished in this world, 575.
Libertine sects of Thyatira, 303.
Liberty, cloak of, 271.
Library, great, of Pergamos, 254; removed to Alexandria, 256; burnt, 256.
Licentiousness followed by suffering, 306.
Life, contrasted with second death, 586; pictures in the various churches, 137.
"Light of Asia," Ephesus, 144.
Light of gospel's morning, 323.
Lightfoot, on fall of Laodicea, 429.
Little opportunities, improving, 552; things, importance of, 524, 525.
Location, of the churches of the messages in Apocalypse, 64.
Love, chief of graces, 516; always founded on truth, 518; cooling of first, at Ephesus, 174, 175; cooling, a great sin, 175; of his people dear to God, 175; perverted into lust, 179, 318; first, lost, 505; turned to lust, 516.
Louis XIV., 512.
Loyalty to Christ, master passion, 542, 497, 541, 542.
Luke, grave of, 191.
Lukewarmness, loathsomeness of, 438, 439, 440; evil of its example, 440; says religion a lie, 441; blights a community, 441; Adam Clarke on, 441; how God loathes, 441; as contrasted with cold, 442; great sin of this age, 443; conquest of, glorious, 453; can be conquered, 453; so common that Bible makes conspicuous, 454; great evil of, 470; at present, 471; evils it involves, 520; brings utter rejection by God, 577, 578.
Luxury, danger of, 512.
Lydia, first convert in Europe, 46; introduced gospel into Europe, 291.

M.

Magic at Ephesus, 51; at temple of Diana, 157.
Mammon, and love to God, 507.
Manna, the hidden, 275, 276, 277; the heavenly, 279.
Marble of Diana's temple still existing, 162.
Marriage of the Lamb, 450.
Martyrdom, builds up the Church, 198; devil the cause of its cruelties, 205; of Polycarp, 215.
Martyrs, presence of God with, 217; of Smyrna, 228; pain taken away, 228.
McGarvey, description of Sardis, 339.
Meander, the river, 373; valley of, 421; and Hermus, 421.
Meats offered to idols, 270, 271.

Mediatorial King, right and appointment, 475; four of the fifteen titles concerned with Christ's qualifications for, 480; Christ's titles as, 484.
Mediatorial kingdom all planned out, 491; throne, glorious views of, 599.
Melito, of Sardis, 352.
Messages, system of seven, chapter (IV.) on, 82.
Messages, purpose of, 125; to be a beacon, 126; contain the principles developed in the Apocalypse, 126; historical purpose, 127; effects of Christianity when first brought into contact with simple paganism, 127; prophetical purpose, 128; their plan prophetical, 129; tendencies which produced the Apocalypse, 128; events prophetical, 128, 129; chiefly a beacon, 129, 130; intended as a chart, 130; location in the Apocalypse, 141; special gift from God, 142; to be very carefully studied, 142; panacea for present evils, 143; to be followed, 143; for one definite thing, each one central point, 174; prophetic of all churches, 213; duties the seven cover, 531; specimens of God's government, 544; God's opinion of all, 611; purpose to make emphatic, 612; repeated seven times to make more emphatic, 612, 613; emphasis they deserve, 615; panacea for existing evils, 615; to be closely studied, 615; how God presses them, 626; importance to ministers, 627; results if heeded, 627; value of their promises, 627; from God! 627; charges they give, 627; heed them, 628.
Messiah, the true, 389.
Ministry, care for, first duty of Presbytery, 539; admit none doubtful, shun the disqualified, 540; carefully guard the entrance, 540; of the church described, 116; dignity of, 120; responsibility of, 120; holiness in the, 120; should be earnestly heard, 121; evil of ridiculing, 121; responsibility of inducting, 121; what it will soon make the church, 122; mission of the Ephesian church, 173.
Missionary work, Paul began the work in Asia Minor, 51; missionary journey of Paul, 386.
Moab and Balaam, 268.
Moderators, angels were, 109.
Morning Star, very rich promise, 321; various interpretations of, 322; what it was, 322, 323; analysis of, 323; promises pre-eminent glory, 324; study emblem in connection with its church, 321; the promises all combined in, 325, 603; Christ the, 603; Christ for all ages, past and future, 605; hope and joy of, 605; Christ gives zest to whole Bible, 606; Christ imparts fresh zest throughout eternity, 606; Christ, source of motives, 609; preparation for coming of Christ, 639.
Mountains of Asia Minor, 17.
Mysteriousness of God's ways, 497.
Mysteries yet to be revealed, 277.
Mystery of the promises, 601.

## N.

Name, signifies person himself, 282; loyalty to Christ's, 295; divine name repeated, 407; of God, saints ever bear the, 408.
"Names in the book of life," 364; upon the pillars of temple, 407; "undesigned coincidence," 407; upon the only pillar of Philadelphia still standing, 407; of God upon the believer, 408; of Christ as a testimony, 409, 410.
Nations, power over the, 320; all given to Christ, 321.
Nanmachia in Pergamos, 244, 245.
Nazarene, Christ and Christians, 214.
"New," a key word, 282; "and white," very important, 282.
New heaven, why so called, 408.
New name, very significent, 282; what is the? 282.
Nicephorium of Pergamos, 246, 249; grove of temples to all the gods, 251.
Nicolaitans, who and what? 263; of early Church, 178; evil in them, 265; who and what? 269; always spring up when gospel planted, 269; worst of antinomians, 269; vile creed of, 269; ignored the law, 269; tolerating, 270; "deeds" of, 516; hated, 532.
Novelties in religion dangerous, 315.
Numbers, the sacred, 99.

## O.

Old age, doing good in, 297.
Old-fogyism, folly of condemning, 625.
Old ways the best, 315.
Omnipresence of Christ, 480.
Omniscience of Christ, 208, 310, 480, 486, 494, 496.
Opposition helps a church, 421; much good for a church, 469, 503.
Openeth, and none shutteth, 388.
Open door of opportunity, 391; of escape, 391; escape, burden of all, 391.
Opportunities, improving, 529.
Opposition to ministers, punished here, 575; to religion, how meet it! 616.
Overcometh, in the seven messages, 192, 232, 274, 319, 362, 403, 452, 548.

## P.

Pactolus, river, and Sardis, 331, 337, 347.
Paganism, Pergamos given to, 760; immorality of, 514; concentrated against Christ, 225; first contact with Christianity, 131.
Papyrus, first used, 255.
Paradise, home of bliss, 195; what was it! 196; dream of youth, 196.
Parchment, discovery of, 255.

Patience, word of my, 394; God's tenderness regarding, 531.
Patmos, general description and birds-eye view, 73.
Paul, daily work in Ephesus, 170; working with his hands, 170; some of his work in Ephesus, 170, 171; missionary trip, 386; in Smyrna, 205; in Pergamos, 256.
Pentecost, strangers converted on, 45; planting gospel in Ephesus, 198; influence on Pergamos, 256; influence on Philadelphia, 385.
Pergamos, chapter (X.) on, 241–284; very celebrated city, 241; location of, 242; royal residence, university town, and cathedral city, 241; situation of, 241; present description, 244; splendid views from, 244; modern improvements in, 244; vast ruins of, 245; marble ruins in, 245; healing grove in, 246; Acropolis of, 246; Nicephorium, of, 246; splendor of its remains, 247; had the right of asylum, 247; influences around its church, 247; as a royal residence, 247; founding of the city, 247; founding of its library, 249; seat of literature and art, 248; its rulers extraordinary men, 249; gorgeous city, 249; arts, literature and inventions, 249; most wonderful city in its day, 249; Prof. Plumptre on, 249; glory of the city, 250; Satan's seat, 252; why called Satan's seat? 252; pre-eminent wickedness of, 252; home of devil-worship, 252; on its coins, 252; persecution in, 253; persecution began and continued in Pergamos, 253; Pergamos its home, 253; of Philadelphia, 393; Domitian's, 393; concentrated depravity of, 254; its great library and parchment, 254; for what founded, 254; causes of its renown, 254; library of, 254; home of medical science, 254; origin of name, Pergamos, 255; planting of its church, 256; church of, lived on, 257; ruined, 257; character of its church, 258; the message of its church, 259; Balaam and Nicolaitans there, 259; trials and steadfastness, 259; league in, against Christ, 259; fidelity of its church, 260; its gaiety, 260; sensuality of, 261; temptations of, 261; persecutions of, 261; awful severity of its persecutions, 261.
Perfection, aim for, 504; all short of, is sin, 504, 553; perfect Christian, 522.
Persecution, at time of Apocalypse, sure to come, 193; all from the devil, 205; in Smyrna, 205; worst under Diocletian, 207; Christ controls, 208; of Jews and popery, 214; the "ten days," 217; concentrated on Smyrna, 225; how inflicted now, 239; good for a church, 503, 535.
Persecutions in Asia Minor, 398.
Perverting the truth, 270.
Perverted truth, all error is, 501.
Pethor, where and what? 267.
Phases of Church life, 138.
Philadelphia, *City of God*, 371; gospel first in, 371; message to, 371; greatly beloved, 371; small and weak, 371; no censure on, 371; name very significant, 371; various names, 372; *Ala-Shehr*, the Beautiful City, 372; name to city of William Penn, 372; lasted longest of the seven, 372; geographic location, 372; splendid location, 373; great local advantages, 373, 374; land of earthquakes, 374; fertility from volcanoes, 374; earthquakes retarded growth of city, 374; burnt region, 374; *Katakekaumene*, 375; flame-destroyed country, 375; earthquakes influenced the messages, 376, 377; city as it is, 377; comparatively insignificant, 377; its destruction, 377; site well chosen, 377; centre of agricultural country, 378; farming its chief industry, 378; local advantages, 378; its industry of dyeing, 379; wine trade of, 379; high moral tone, 379; celebrated for courage, 379; history of, 380; founded by Attalus Philadelphus, from affection to his brother, 380; leading events of its history, 380; heroic struggle when it fell, 381; last city taken by the Turks, 381; Jewish colony in, 381; Macedonians originally, 379; Tiberius rebuilt, after earthquake, 380; Bacchus its deity, 383; origin of its church, 384; its "overcometh," 384; four causes of its growth, 485: (1) Pentecostal origin, 385; (2) Paul's work in founding it, 386; (3) conversions, 386; (4) boatmen going up the river, 387; travellers on their trips, 387; Jewish merchants, 387; by terrors of earthquakes, 387; titles of Christ in message to, 388; central point of message, 390; its open door, 391, 392; bravery at the last, 393; all centres in "open door," 393; approbation of its church, 393; church of few, weak, poor, 394; three promises to, 396; honorable titles of, 397; some appalling events, 397; trials of, 398; promises to, 403; pillar in temple of God, 404; of Philadelphia remaining still, 405; Gibbon's confession about, 405; "no more out," 406; and history of, 410; message in the Beacon, 413.
Philip crucified in Hierapolis, 428, 433.
Philippi, gospel first preached in, 46.
Points, great number of, vi., 102; seen in each message, 472; classified, 472.
Polycarp, martyrdom of, 214–217; tomb of, 236.
Poor, early Christians, 209; churches always to be, 414, needed in divine economy, 414.
Population, original, of Asia Minor, cosmopolitan, 28; of Hebrews, 206; of Smyrna's church, 209; causes of great numbers, 209.

Power over nations, to believers, 590.
Practical life, aim of Beacon, 142.
Predictions often refer to several events, 633.
Presence, God's, with martyrs, 328.
Present, God calls men, 622; evils, nostrums for, 623, 624.
Preparation for coming of Christ, 572, 639, 640; the first coming, 659; then come as Lord to judge, 660.
Pretensions of all errorists, 302; all, were in Thyatira, 304.
Pride and conceit of Laodicea, danger of, 470; great evil of, 509; various kinds of, 509; sorely abused, 573.
Principles of interpretation, iii.; general, embrace all particulars, 101; the great thing involved, 140; prevailing ones, 580.
Privileges abused are removed, 568.
Process, of evil, gradual, 503; of backsliding, 506.
Progress in good works, 297; in grace, 540.
Promises, sum of, 627; in form of reproach, 583; lists of, 597, 581, 554; marvelous plan, 602; embodied in one saint, 603; glorious ending, 608; sublime charge to, 609.
Promises, most precious, that of *tessera hospitalis*, 281; to Thyatira, 313; God cheers by, 320; to Sardis, 363; three to Philadelphia, 396; clusters to Philadelphia, 403, 415; special to Laodicea, 454; last of the seven, 460; last general, 460; seven items, 464; before threatening, 661; in the messages, 581; chapter (XXI.) on, 581; cords of love, 581; each two elements, local and general, 581; germ first, full afterwards, 582; by emblems found in the place, 582; in appropriate figures, 582; most suitable, 582; given as rewards, 583; like each city, 584; progress in the, 554.
Prophetical purpose of the messages, 128.
Providence, good out of evil, 154; God's over all things, 208, 437, 488, 489, 495; God's calls by his, 437; God's, watching all, 493; God's, of the churches, 493; special, in the Beacon, 134.
Providences, horror of sudden, 571; earthquake (Lisbon), Pompeii, Vesuvius, Johnstown, Laodicea, 570.
Pull down, effort of guilt, 615.
Purity of true piety, 360.

## Q.

Question, always one special, of the day, 538.
"Quickly," Scripture use of, 187; three principles, 646.

## R.

Raiment, the white, 449.
Rainbow about the throne, 599.
Rebuke of Laodicea, 438.
Rebukes, classified, 505, after approvals, 521.
Record the Spirit made at first, 139.
Religion attacked on all sides, 416; how defended, 616–618.
Religions, original, of Asia, 615.
Remedy, none but gospel needed, 618, 619.
Repentance, first great duty, 549; by all, at all times, 549.

## S.

Sabbath, pledge of covenant in redemption, 99; various days of week observed as, 237.
Sardis, first planting gospel in, 41; safety, 231; peculiarities, 529; and Laodicea, only two in utter ruins, 329, 330; no opposition to gospel, 329; location, 330; centre of civilization, 330; great, 330; immense commerce, 330, 331; beautiful site, 330, 331, 332; elements of its beauty, 331; produce of surrounding country, 331; city as it was, 331; chiefly its golden sands, 331; as it was then, 331; at zenith of its greatness, 332; in its various stages, 332; humanity developed in, 332; "beautiful capital of Lydia," 332; wonderful views from, 332; panorama, 333; proverbially corrupt, 333; vicissitudes, 333; Cybele its worship, 333; declined, but revived again, 333; Tiberius befriended it, 333; corrupt worship, 333; history of, 334; length of history of, 214; periods of its history, 334; period of myths, 334; first, 334; cotemporary events, 334; sad downfall of all, 335; Roman period, 336; final destruction, 336; history, a picture of human greatness, 336; golden sands, 337; Crœsus, 337; remarkable objects in, 339; grand views, 339, 340; mountain back of, 340; Gerusia, 342; old man's home, 342; fortunes of its Gerusia, 342; condition of its church, 344; in richest valley, 344; views from its acropolis, 345; only church building still stands, 345; scenery around, 346; only ruins now, 347; highway of, 347; ruins, ruins! 348; sad musings at, 349; inhabitants now, 349; desolations of, 349; Arundell's description of, 349; sad vicissitudes of, 350; planting its church, 350; first preaching in, 351; night meditations at, 350; first piety of, 351; backsliding, 351; sad spiritual condition, 351; central point in message to, 354; hypocrites, 356; dreadful state of, censured, 357; armistice with the world, 357; nothing to persecute, 357; one of the two not persecuted, 357; a few witnesses in, 358; approbation of, 363; threatened, 361; overcoming, 362; saints manifested, 365; promises to, 363; in the Beacon, 366.

Saints, safety from second death, 587; confessed by Christ, 594, 595, 596; enthroned in glory, 601; Morning Star, safety from that name, 604; saints glorified at the judgment, 656; names confessed, 656; Up! Christ is coming, 658.
Satan—synagogue, throne, depths of, 214; seat of, 622; in Pergamos, 252; 316; "as they speak," 317.
Schemes, new, folly of, 625.
Science, egotism of, 210.
Scott, Rev. Dr., on Jezebel, 301.
Scripture, "It is written," 258; adaptability of, 258; cutting power, 272, 273; sword with two edges, 273.
Scriptures, special purpose in each part, 123; how to discover purport of each passage, 125.
"Second death," what; horrors of, 232; escape from, the greatest blessing, 233; what is? 586; safety from, 587.
Seduction, Jezebel its symbol, 301; of sin, 309.
Self, sin of resting on, 564; Henry Martin on, 564, 565; sacrificing of Pergamese Christians, 262.
Self-conceit of antinomianism, 519.
Self-conquest, 453.
Selfishness, living for nothing, 547; wretchedness of, 508.
Self-righteousness, boasting, 318.
Serpent-worship of Æsculapius, 251.
Seven the number, all-pervading number, 97; prominence of, 98; meaning of, 98; covenant number in redemption, 99; symbol of God and man reconciled, 100; symbol of atonement, 100.
Seven churches, each represent a fruit of the Spirit, 522; specimens of, 522.
Seven Sleepers of Asia, 163.
Seven Spirits, 481; spiritual kingdom, 481.
Shrine-making at Diana's temple, 159.
Similarity of curse and blessing, 195.
Sin, insidiousness of, 305; seductions of, 308; self-propagation of sin, 308; always spreads, 308; impossible to the renewed, says the Antinomian, 518; deteriorating influence of, 562, 563; demands punishment, 563; punishment just like the, 564; on our own head, 564; sometimes punished here, 576.
Singularity of manner of the messages, 64.
Skepticism aims only to pull down, 615.
Smyrna, first planting of gospel, 40–46; a notable city, 198; one eye of Asia, 198; various names for, 198; a martyr city, 198; importance of its message, 199; mentioned only here, 199; great influence of, 199; splendid site, 199; queen of the Levant, 199, 200; Light of Asia, 199; best seaport of Ægean, 199; commercial city of the world, 200; accessible to all great cities, distances to all great cities, 201; stirring scenes in, 200; its perfect location, 201; splendor within its walls, 201; birthplace of Homer, 201, 202; Homer its glory, 204; planting its church, 204, 65; persecutions in, 205; central point of its message, 205; history of, 202; planting church, two things, 205; poverty, 206, 209; poverty, works, sufferings, 209; active church, 211; tribulations and cause, 211; its riches, 211; full of Jews, 213; totality of its tribulations, 224; church always blessed, 228; most suffering and most blessed, 228; with Philadelphia, no charge against, 229; infidel Smyrna, 229; fitting that it be crowned, 231; as it is now, 233; gulf of, 234; finest harbor in the world, 234; splendid approach to, 235; wretched sewerage of, 236; plague in, 236; heterogeneous population, 237; women of, 237; languages used in, 237; religious state of, 237, 238; warning of its Beacon, 638.
Solon and Crœsus, 338.
Son of God, title, 294; reasons for title, 295; divinity of, 295; burning eyes of, 295; majesty of his motions, 295; wrath of, 295, 296.
Son of man, title, 433; in Laodicea, 433; third title of Christ, 477, 432.
Soothsaying in the time of Balaam, 266.
Spirit essential, 526; power of, 527; given up of, 564; of the age, absorbed with folly, 624, 625.
State of world at time of messages, 68.
Stability, promise to Philadelphia, 404, 406; of future glory, 406.
Stages of Christianity, 640, 642.
Star of hope, the great, 325.
Stars—angels, chapter (V.) on, 104; principles of interpretation, 105; different views, 104, 106; ministry as lights, 114; in God's right hand, 479.
Steadfastness in the faith, 537; for the truth, 438; of Philadelphia, 259.
Striving, of God with sinners, 456; for the divine blessing, 618.
Structure of messages, 69.
Struggles awaiting Christians, 193.
Sublimity of Christ's coming, 641.
Substantialness of Christ's kingdom, 433.
Suddenness of divine judgments, 362; of Christ's coming, 570, 644.
Suffering for Christ, warning, 534; doom of the Church, 534; for Christ's sake, 535.
Surroundings of the passages, 68.
Sword with two edges, 257; how to use it, 258; adaptability of, 258; of the Spirit, 272.
Symbols, great number, design, novelty of, .
Synagogue, office borrowed from, 109; of Satan, 214.

## T.

Tampering with evil, danger of, 503.
Tapestry invented in Pergamos, 249.

Teachers, against false, 539.
Temples of all idolatry at Pergamos, 253.
Temple of Diana, building of, 156; grandeur of, 156; described, 157; home of magic, 157; repository of art, 158; great treasury, 159; shrine-making, 159; revenue attracted, 159.
Temptation, shunning, 551; earnest warnings against, 551.
Ten days, "tribulation for," 217.
Ten, the number, 224.
Terrors as Christ comes, 648.
Tesselated pavements in Pergamos, 244.
*Tessera hospitalis*, described, 280, 281; most blessed engagement of Christ, 281; substance of divine engagement, 281, 588.
Thief in the night, Christ comes as, 570.
Titles of Christ, reliable, 435; the full, 437; in the messages, 294; all adapted to the churches, 207; to Smyrna, 207; to Pergamos, 257, 258; to Philadelphia, 388; analysis of, 388.
Throne, the white, 365; Christ on the Father's, 463; the great white, 463; Christ "*in*," not *on*, 465; Messiah taking the, 473; Christ's right to the mediatorial, 475; of all the world, Christ's, 477; all glories centre in the, 598; of supreme empire, 600.
Thyatira, an earthly paradise, 288; location, 288; inside the city, 288; present miserable state of, 289; picture of God in, 289; Arundell on, 290; history of its church, 290; heterogeneous population, 291; gospel's first introduction, 291; founding of city, and industries, 292; gross superstitions in, 292; Greek colony, 292; Apollo its deity, 293; Sambethe's temple, 293; present condition, 294; central point, 298; corruptions of its church, 318; surroundings of its church, 322; Tiberius friend of Sardis, 346; first preaching in, 48; name of, 287; commendations of, 296; curse on, 307.
Timothy, planting gospel in Asia Minor, 384; in Philadelphia, 386; first epistle to, from Laodicea, 429; working in Ephesus, 172.
Titles of the Mediatorial King, 473, 484; Mediator, 473; together they show glories of Christ, 474, 475.
Tmolus, the mountain, 340.
Tolerating evils, 263, 269, 270, 299, 532.
Topography of Asia Minor, 18.
Tree of life, Christ will give, 194; lost and recovered, 195; "leaves for healing of the nations," 196; and immortality, 585.
Trench, on Christ's coming, 647; on antinomianism, 313; on lukewarmness, 442.
Trials, by persecutions, 206; for tests, 207; of Pergamos, 259.
Tristram, Canon, on stability of glory, 406; on Laodicea, 420, 468; on the last promise, 460.
True, Jesus the, 389; the real Messiah, 389.
Truth, steadfast for, 538; sacredly guard, 551; is health, 552; Christ king of, 552.
Truthfulness concerning divine kingdom, 483.
Turks, brutal sack of Laodicea by, 429.
Two-edged sword, Word of God the, 569.

## U.

Uncleanness punished on earth, 573.
Unexpectedness of Christ's coming, 644, 645.

## V.

"Valley of Sweets," at Sardis, 346.
Vanity of all earthly things, 336, 337.
Variety of church life, 137.
Victory and reward connected, 232; final victory of Christ, 321.
Virtues, the various, produced by the gospel, 138.

## W.

Walking in white, 366.
Warning, words of, 225; to Laodicea, 450; faithful, by Christ, 534; God's solemn warnings, 571.
Watch for coming of Christ, 658.
Watcher, the celestial, 486.
Watchfulness demanded, 361, 529, 549, 550, 663.
Weakness, perfected by strength, 415.
Wealth, not friendly to grace, 329, 443; causes lukewarmness, 443; makes men feel independent, 444; five terms to show wretchedness of, 444; danger of, 470; a great blessing, 508, 509.
Well-doing, continuance in, 528.
White, emblem often used, 282; significance of, 282; emblem of purity, 360; livery of heaven, 365; white throne, 365; white stone and new name, 279, 280, 283; white raiment of righteousness, 449; saints in, 594.
Wisdom, Christ's unerring, 481.
Witnesses, some, at all times, 358; *now*, judges *then*, 592.
Witness, Christ the true, 434; faithful and true, 434, 435; also competent, 435; qualified also, 436; witness of Spirit, 282.
Word, in Scripture, 258.
Word of God, cutting power of, 272, 273; sword, 568; name on vesture of Jesus, 591.
Words, each significent, 104; of Christ are his will, 480.
Work, in the early church, 526; of God, by human agency, 526; needs aid of the spirit, 526; without spirit vain, 526.

Working for Christ, 525, 526.
Works of prime importance, 185; of Pergamos, 262; good, of Thyatira, 296; God notices, 296; God does according to, 310, 311; of Christ, 488; of Church, 488; God knows all our, 488, 489; punishment according to, 562.
World, foe to soul, 363; deplorable influence of, 507.
Worldly conformity censured, 357, 507.
Worldliness and its effects, 367; of Laodicea, 427; its malign features always the same, 506, 507; sin of the age, 513.
World's fair at Ephesus, 160.

## Z.

Zeal: "Be zealous!" 446; sorely needed at present time, 557.

# SCRIPTURE INDEX.


GENESIS.

| CH. & VER. | PAGE |
|---|---|
| 2 : 17 | 585 |
| 3 : 5 | 318 |
| 3 : 24 | 585 |

EXODUS.

| | |
|---|---|
| 16 : 33 | 277 |

NUMBERS.

| | |
|---|---|
| 22 : 2 | 267 |
| 22 : 5 | 266, 515 |
| 22 : 7 | 267 |
| 23 : 8 | 515 |
| 25 : 9 | 273 |
| 24 : 17 | 323 |
| 22 : 23 | 272 |

DEUTERONOMY.

| | |
|---|---|
| 6 : 5 | 578 |

I. SAMUEL.

| | |
|---|---|
| 14 : 6 | 415 |

I. KINGS.

| | |
|---|---|
| 10 : 7 | 606 |
| 21 : 27 | 304 |
| 22 : 29 | 304 |

II. KINGS.

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 : 2 | 306 |
| 9 : 26 | 312 |
| 9 : 33 | 307 |
| 10 : 7 | 308 |
| 10 : 11 | 308 |

PSALMS.

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 : 1 | 271, 553 |
| 2 : 1 | 225 |
| 2 : 2 | 555 |
| 2 : 4 | 480 |
| 2 : 4 | 493 |
| 2 : 6 | 477, 590 |
| 2 : 8 | 478 |
| 7 : 15 | 564 |
| 7 : 15, 16 | 564 |
| 16 : 10 | 389 |
| 17 : 8 | 180 |
| 23 : 4 | 227 |
| 25 : 14 | 278 |
| 45 : 2 | 176 |
| 45 : 3, 4 | 530 |
| 46 : 1 | 481 |
| 50 : 10 | 212 |
| 62 : 12 | 312 |
| 72 : 6 | 634 |
| 72 : 16 | 525, 553 |
| 76 : 9 | 530 |
| 76 : 10 | 320 |
| 90 : 4 | 187 |
| 103 : 14 | 476 |
| 105 : 15 | 479 |
| 106 : 43 | 573 |
| 119 : 126 | 623 |
| 147 : 6 | 533 |
| 149 : 5 | 591 |

PROVERBS.

| | |
|---|---|
| 6 : 10 | 363 |
| 8 : 27 | 437 |
| 16 : 18 | 512 |
| 24 : 12 | 311 |
| 29 : 23 | 511 |

ECCLESIASTES.

| | |
|---|---|
| 8 : 11 | 304, 576 |

SONG OF SOLOMON.

| | |
|---|---|
| 5 : 2–6 | 457 |
| 5 : 10 | 278 |

ISAIAH.

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 : 5, 6 | 512 |
| 2 : 17 | 511, 573 |
| 9 : 5 | 482 |
| 24 : 23 | 652 |
| 28 : 5 | 231 |
| 28 : 21 | 561 |
| 41 : 10 | 228 |
| 41 : 14 | 389 |
| 49 : 15, 16 | 589 |
| 49 : 23 | 397 |
| 49 : 16 | 180 |
| 53 : 2 | 278, 525, 553 |
| 53 : 11 | 654 |
| 55 : 1 | 447, 555 |
| 55 : 2 | 276 |
| 60 : 1 | 627 |
| 60 : 13 | 397 |
| 63 : 9 | 238 |

JEREMIAH.

| | |
|---|---|
| 2 : 2 | 176, 523 |
| 17 : 6 | 441 |
| 17 : 9 | 512 |
| 17 : 10 | 563 |
| 22 : 24 | 180 |
| 49 : 16 | 511 |

LAMENTATIONS.

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 : 12 | 622 |
| 3 : 33 | 561 |

EZEKIEL.

| | |
|---|---|
| 23 : 45–48 | 309 |
| 27 : 27 | 165 |
| 33 : 11 | 561 |
| 33 : 32 | 440 |

DANIEL.

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 : 2 | 34 |
| 3 : 25 | 587 |
| 4 : 30 | 512 |
| 4 : 34 | 489 |
| 7 : 23 | 100 |
| 7 : 14 | 652 |
| 7 : 27 | 590 |
| 12 : 2 | 573, 579 |
| 12 : 3 | 325 |

HOSEA.

| | |
|---|---|
| 2 : 15 | 523–561 |
| 4 : 17 | 441 |
| 6 : 4 | 441 |
| 6 : 5 | 272 |
| 11 : 8 | 450 |

AMOS.

| | |
|---|---|
| 8 : 11 | 566 |

HABAKKUK.

| | |
|---|---|
| 3 : 2 | 625 |

ZECHARIAH.

| | |
|---|---|
| 2 : 8 | 180, 589 |
| 3 : 8 | 366 |
| 4 : 6 | 482, 525, 526 |
| 4 : 10 | 553 |
| 13 : 6 | 436 |
| 13 : 8 | 278 |

MALACHI.

| | |
|---|---|
| 2 : 7 | 105 |
| 3 : 10 | 626 |
| 3 : 16 | 495 |

MATTHEW.

Ch. & Ver. PAGE

4 : 4 . . . . . 258
4 : 10 . . . . . 533
5 : 3 . . . . . 510, 622
5 : 5 . . . . . 530
5 : 48 . . . 265, 504, 554
6 : 33 . . . . . 439
6 : 13 . . . . . 533
10 : 28 . . . . . 586
10 : 29 . . . . . 495
10 : 34 . . . . . 211
11 : 28 . . . . . 313, 314
11 : 29 . . . . . 510
11 : 30 . . . . . 314
12 : 20 . . . . . 358
12 : 34 . . . . . 487
12 : 37 . . . . . 563
12 : 45 . . . . . 440
13 : 22 . . . . . 573
13 : 43 . . . . . 324
16 : 19 . . . . . 118
16 : 18 . . . . 187, 490, 491
16 : 24 . . . . . 238
16 : 27 . . . . . 311
17 : 4 . . . . . 278
18 : 10 . . . . . 107
19 : 24 . . . . . 507
19 : 26 . . . . . 508
19 : 28 . . . . . 591, 592
20 : 3 . . . . . 652
21 : 16 . . . . . 524
23 : 12 . . . . 470, 511, 573
24 : 2 . . . . . 427
24 : 15 . . . . . 427
24 : 27 . . . . . 634, 644
24 : 29–31 . . . . . 648
24 : 36 . . . . . 643
24 : 44 . . . . . 634
25 : 6 . . . . . 638, 653
25 : 21 . . . . . 183
25 : 31 . . . . . 594
25 : 32 . . . . . 635, 652
25 : 35 . . . . . 583
26 : 29 . . . . . 276, 278
26 : 38 . . . . . 208
26 : 40 . . . . . 403, 529
26 : 41 . . . . . 529
27 : 25 . . . . . 565
28 : 18 . . . . 390, 590, 651
28 : 20 . . . . . 489

MARK.

3 : 28, 29 . . . . . 576
10 : 23 . . . . . 470, 507
13 : 37 . . . . . 550, 627
13 : 35 . . . . . 644

LUKE.

12 : 8 . . . . . 364
12 : 19 . . 344, 470, 508, 509
12 : 20 . . . . . 510
15 : 16 . . . . . 184
16 : 13 . . . . . 507
18 : 11 . . . . . 510
18 : 13 . . . . . 510
28 : 24 . . . . . 210

Ch & Ver. PAGE

20 : 46 . . . . . 366
21 : 11 . . . . . 648
23 : 21 . . . . . 565

JOHN.

4 : 32 . . . . . 278
5 : 39 . . . . . 623
6 : 35 . . . . . 279
6 : 50 . . . . . 279
7 : 24 . . . . . 494
10 : 27, 28 . . . . . 359
13 : 34 . . . . . 536
13 : 35 . . . . . 516
14 : 2 . . . . 584, 592, 650
14 : 3 . . . . . 632
14 : 18 . . . . . 632, 633
16 : 16 . . . . . 632, 633
18 : 37 . . . . . 552
20 : 21 . . . . . 547
21 : 22 . . . . . 632

ACTS.

5 : 41 . . . . . 228
10 : 38 . . . . . 488
14 : 22 . . 193, 238, 470, 534
15 : 29 . . . . . 269, 274
15 : 28 . . . . . 313
15 : 29 . . . . . 314, 315
16 : 14 . . . . . 291
19 : 1 . . . . . 7
19 : 8 . . . . . 10
19 : 10 . . . . . 173, 386
19 : 10–34 . . . . . 53, 54
19 : 34 . . . . . 165, 190
19 : 35 . . . . . 40
20 : 18 . . . . . 170
20 : 28 . . . . . 110

ROMANS.

1 : 18 . . . . . 269
6 : 14 . . 178, 269, 313, 500, 516, 517
8 : 17 . . . . . 212, 592
8 : 31 . . . . . 453
11 : 36 . . . . . 476
12 : 1 . . . . . 504, 527
14 : 10 . . . . . 563

I. CORINTHIANS.

1 : 27 . . . . . 209, 525
2 : 9 . . . . . 277, 465
3 : 21–23 . . . . 212, 448
9 : 25 . . . . . 231
10 : 11 . . . . . 129, 554
10 : 13 . . . . . 587
11 : 12 . . . . . 575
11 : 26 . . . . . 632
12 : 28 . . . . . 479
13 : 13 . . . . . 516–536
15 : 26 . . . . . 319
15 : 32 . . . . . 171
15 : 55 . . . . . 588
15 : 32 . . . . . 649

II. CORINTHIANS.

4 : 17 . . . . . 555
5 : 17 . . . . . 282

Ch. & Ver. PAGE

6 : 16–18 . . . . . 264
12 : 19 . . . . . 524

GALATIANS.

5 : 19 . . . . . 514
5 : 22, 23 . . . . . 521

EPHESIANS.

1 : 15 . . . . . 174, 175
1 : 19 . . . . . 594
1 : 19–22 . . . . 590, 600
1 : 21 . . . . . 463, 654
2 : 2 . . . . . 181, 363
2 : 4 . . . . . 297
2 : 10 . . . . . 504
6 : 13 . . . . . 192
6 : 12 . . . . . 205, 320
6 : 17 . . . . . 258, 272

PHILLIPIANS.

2 : 7, 8 . . . . . 511
2 : 9–11 . . . . . 600
3 : 7, 8 . . . . . 448
3 : 12 . . . . . 553
3 : 13 . . . . . 527, 540
4 : 5 . . . . . 630

COLOSSIANS.

1 : 16 . . . . . 99
1 : 16–18 . . . . . 437
2 : 1 . . . . . 433
4 : 16 . . . . . 433

I. THESSALONIANS.

4 : 15–17 . . . . . 650
4 : 16 . . . . . 249
5 : 23 . . . . . 504
5 : 22 . . . . . 533
5 : 3 . . . . . 572
5 : 4 . . . . . 646

II. THESSALONIANS.

2 : 6 . . . . . 512
2 : 8 . . . . . 258
1 : 10 . . . . . 632

I. TIMOTHY.

5 : 22 . . . . . 540
6 : 18 . . . . . 210
6 : 22 . . . . . 429
6 : 17 . . . . . 443

II. TIMOTHY.

3 : 16, 17 . . . . . 123
4 : 8 . . . . . 230

PHILEMON.

2 . . . . . 439

HEBREWS.

2 : 10 . . . . . 238, 555
4 : 12 . . . . 258, 273, 568
9 : 15 . . . . . 643
10 : 34 . . . . . 206
10 : 37 . . . . . 633
12 : 2 . . 554, 559, 584, 599

JAMES.

| Ch. & Ver. | page |
|---|---|
| 1 : 27 | 359 |
| 2 : 5 | 209 |
| 2 : 7 | 214 |
| 4 : 8 | 359 |

I. PETER.

| | |
|---|---|
| 2 : 23 | 214 |
| 2 : 9 | 656 |
| 5 : 5 | 510 |

II. PETER.

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 : 5–7 | 288 |
| 2 : 1 | 178 |
| 2 : 18 | 178 |
| 2 : 15 | 268 |
| 2 : 13, 14 | 513 |
| 3 : 9 | 305 |
| 3 : 18 | 540 |
| 3 : 10 | 644 |
| 3 : 4 | 645 |
| 5 : 7 | 554 |

I. JOHN.

| | |
|---|---|
| 3 : 2 | 277, 279, 607 |

JUDE.

| | |
|---|---|
| 4 | 178 |
| 12 | 178 |
| 23 | 502, 533 |

REVELATION.

| | |
|---|---|
| 1 : 3 | 611 |
| 1 : 5 | 629 |
| 1 : 5, 6 | 614 |
| 1 : 7 | 629, 630, 631, 635 638, 652 |
| 1 : 7, 8 | 638 |
| 1 : 11 | 437, 642 |
| 1 : 15 | 480 |
| 1 : 16 | 118, 257 |
| 1 : 17 | 207, 208, 639 |
| 1 : 18 | 207, 208, 267, 473, 475 |
| 1 : 19 | 489 |
| 1 : 20 | 112 |
| 2 : 1 | 119, 175, 180, 479 |
| 2 : 2 | 182, 487, 488, 489, 490, 491, 493, 494, 497 |
| 2 : 3 | 181, 184, 528, 541 |
| 2 : 4 | 173, 174, 177, 183, 505 |
| 2 : 5 | 166, 177, 185, 186, 566, 634 |
| 2 : 6 | 502, 516 |
| 2 : 7 | 141, 582, 585, 586, 611, 624 |
| 2 : 8 | 207, 476, 482 |
| 2 : 9 | 209, 210, 211, 212, 213, 214, 238 |
| 2 : 10 | 198, 205, 206, 211, 224, 226, 228, 229, 234, 235 |
| 2 : 11 | 198, 229, 232, 233, 582, 587, 660 |
| 2 : 12 | 257, 480 |
| 2 : 13 | 252, 253, 259, 262, 535, 541 |
| 2 : 14 | 263, 264, 268, 516 |
| 2 : 15 | 263, 269, 265, 270, 523 |
| 2 : 16 | 270, 271, 272, 273, 549, 568 |
| 2 : 17 | 274, 275, 280, 283, 410, 582 |
| 2 : 18 | 293, 294, 295, 309, 477, 480 |
| 2 : 19 | 296, 535, 541 |
| 2 : 20 | 298, 309 |
| 2 : 21 | 303, 305 |
| 2 : 23 | 306, 307, 312 |
| 2 : 24 | 312, 313, 316, 317 |
| 2 : 25 | 313 |
| 2 : 26 | 319, 589 |
| 2 : 28 | 321, 324 |
| 3 : 1 | 344, 348, 353, 354, 356. 358, 507 |
| 3 : 2 | 351, 356, 357, 358, 361, 349, 553 |
| 3 : 3 | 351, 361, 362, 523, 636 |
| 3 : 4 | 333, 351, 358, 359, 360, 365, 366, 367, 497 |
| 3 : 5 | 362, 363, 364, 365, 582, 593, 594, 656 |
| 3 : 7 | 388, 390, 477 |
| 3 : 8 | 371, 377, 394, 398, 403 |
| 3 : 9 | 396, 572, 573 |
| 3 : 10 | 377, 394, 395, 398, 400 |
| 3 : 11 | 377, 392, 400, 401, 403, 440, 550, 644, 645, 647 |
| 3 : 12 | 384, 397, 404, 406, 407, 408, 595, 596 |
| 3 : 14 | 434, 435, 436, 476, 483 |
| 3 : 15 | 438, 440, 442, 577, 579 |
| 3 : 16 | 450, 468, 511, 568 |
| 3 : 17 | 443, 444, 445, 512 |
| 3 : 18 | 448, 449 |
| 3 : 19 | 446, 455 |
| 3 : 20 | 455, 458 |
| 3 : 21 | 453, 460, 461, 465, 591, 597, 598, 601, 639 |
| 3 : 22 | 322 |
| 4 : 4 | 656 |
| 4 : 6 | 599 |
| 4 : 10, 11 | 599 |
| 4 : 8 | 599, 608 |
| 5 : 6 | 590, 659, 688 |
| 6 : 16 | 547, 572 |
| 7 : 14 | 365, 656 |
| 7 : 15 | 656 |
| 14 : 13 | 687 |
| 18 | 147 |
| 19 : 7–9 | 650 |
| 19 : 18 | 320 |
| 20 : 13 | 563 |
| 22 : 2 | 196 |
| 22 : 12 | 312 |
| 22 : 16 | 324 |
| 22 : 20 | 644, 647 |

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